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# VIDEO

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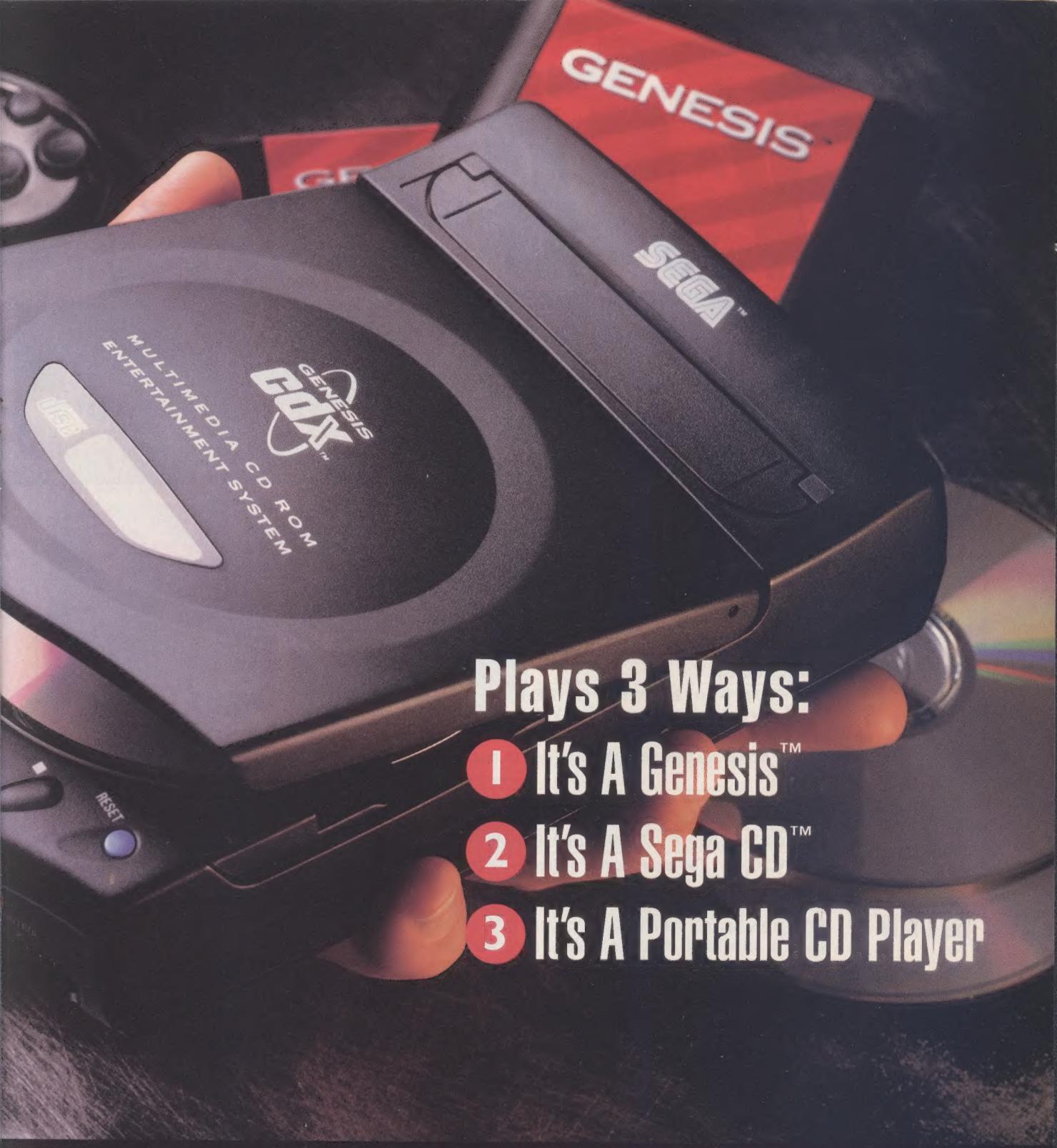
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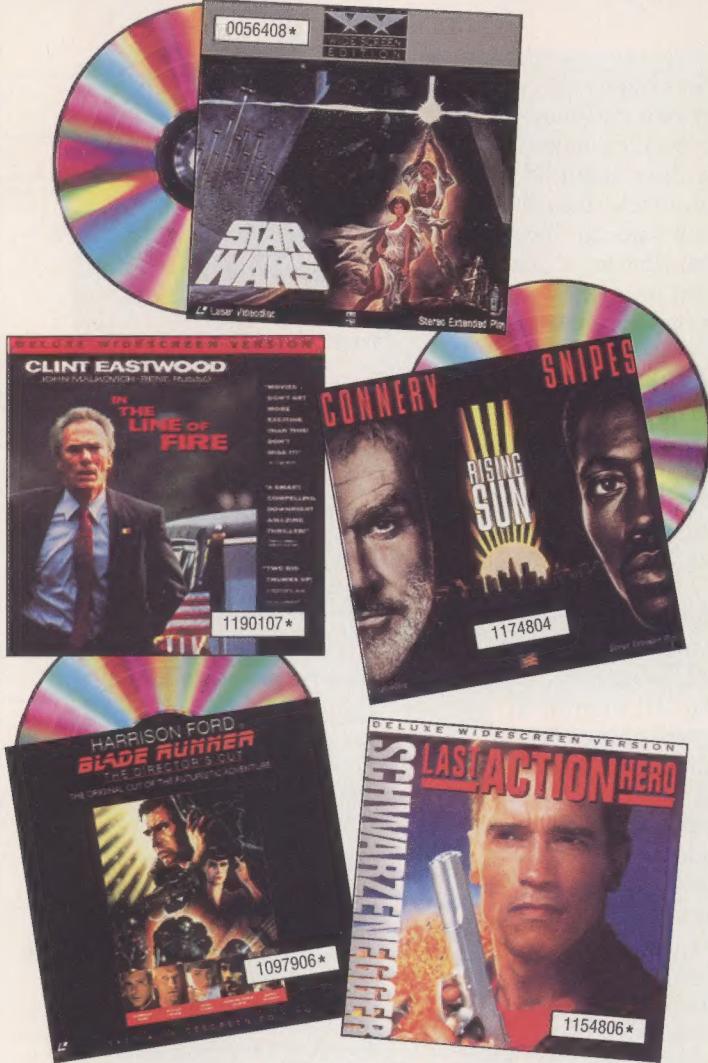
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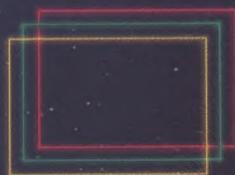
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## CHANNEL ONE



## Great video adventures

Home video is a great liberator, freeing us from the whims and constraints of television networks, cable operators and crowded movie theaters. In the make-your-own video department, smaller, lighter camcorders have excused us from the heavy lifting once required to bring back moving pictures of vacations, outings and treks into the wild. But that doesn't mean we always like to play it safe. In "Born To Be Wild," this issue's cover story, three intrepid contributors explain what you'll need to know to take a camcorder along on your favorite outdoor adventures. You'll find their tips on shooting and equipment care invaluable whether you're going down to the sea or under it, out of a plane, or up into the mountains. Be careful out there.

For many less adventurous folks the full-size VHS camcorder is the way to go. If that's what you're interested in, our "VHS Camcorder Buying Guide" will give you the lowdown on what's available as well as a comparison chart for making an informed buying decision. It follows Buying Guides for VHS-C and S-VHS-C camcorders in the March issue, and for 8mm and Hi8 camcorders last November. We'll be continuing this series in future issues.

For those who like their adventures indoors, delivered on a big screen in a state-of-the-art home theater, contributing editor Corey Greenberg completes the comprehensive look at THX-approved components that senior editor Brent Butterworth began last month, in "THX on Trial." We think you'll find the listening adventure recounted in "The Decoder Debate" every bit as challenging as the open-air excursions our other contributors enjoyed.

Another increasingly popular indoor sport involves using a computer to generate multimedia presentations that include video. If you're in the market for a new computer, you'll want to check out contributor Ron Goldberg's "Multimedia Magicians," a hands-on look at the value of Apple's Quadra AVs to the video addicted. This new line of Macs is designed specifically to accommodate video applications, another sign that the line between computers and video continues to blur.

Finally, real-life natural disasters like this winter's earthquakes and snow storms remind us how tame some disaster movies are. The '70s were the "golden age" of disaster flicks, and contributing editor Bruce Eder takes us on a trip down a very bumpy memory lane in "That's Armageddon!" Even though we may be more jaded these days, the fascination for these pix doesn't wane. Many Los Angeles area video stores reported that even as the aftershocks rumbled following January's devastating quake, one of the hottest rental titles was -- you guessed it -- *Earthquake*.

James M. Barry  
Editor

# VIDEO

magazine

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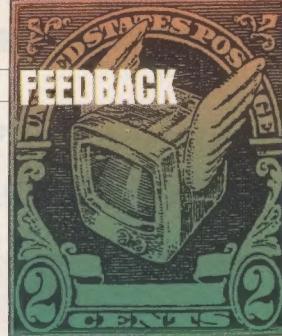
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## HDTV tapes and Beta regrets

### Tale of the tape

Your feature on the likely form of the first HDTV video decks ("The HDTV VCR: Designing the First Hi-Def Deck," Feb. '94) was a fascinating look into the future. Frankly, it was also a little worrisome. The market overwhelmingly went against the shorter-play Beta tapes, yet the HDTV tape is slated for only two hours. This could be a serious handicap for a new format, when existing tapes have vastly longer LP modes. To make matters worse, the camcorder tapes will be a mere 30 minutes. Hasn't the market cast a clear vote on short-play cassettes with VHS-C? To top it off, consumers may also have to give up features we're used to enjoying. I'm afraid such tapes will sell HDTV short, just as happened to Beta. Michael D. Zuteck Kemah, Texas

Graduate, which is letterboxed and includes the kind of supplementary materials usually available only on laserdisc.

Wesley Moore  
Covina, California



Ed Harris in *Swing Shift*

### Basic Ed

Movie critics are still going on about Sharon Stone's provocative "sitting scene" in *Basic Instinct*. Don't they realize she'd already been outdone by Ed Harris in *Swing Shift*? And Ed only had a PG-rated movie to work with!

Susan Milo  
Suffern, New York

*Editor's Note:* Ed Harris, seated and clad only in a bath towel, does indeed briefly expose the naked truth in *Swing Shift*.

### For the record

A "Tech Tip" in the March issue improperly suggested using a six-volt auto bulb to fully drain a camcorder battery before recharging. While this will work, a nickel cadmium battery should be discharged only to a certain point. Exceeding this level may damage it. A tip of the hat to Mike Nassour of Austin, Texas for pointing out our error.

*Video Magazine* welcomes your comments. Address correspondence to Feedback, *Video Magazine*, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.



Which scares you more, a horror film with the sound turned off, or a horror show on the radio? The answer is easy because it is the movie's soundtrack which carries the pathos and emotion. You can enjoy sound without pictures, but who wants pictures without sound?

# It's What You Don't See That Counts.



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# Now buying a camcorder that can only shoot with one lens seems rather shortsighted.

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Imagine having the freedom to shoot extra wide one minute and super telephoto the next. With the L2's fully electronic VL lens mount system, it's all

possible. The mount allows you to work with five precision-engineered genuine Canon video lenses, including our extra wide 3x zoom, 8x medium zoom, wide range 15x zoom, 250mm super telephoto, and our 10x zoom with Optical Image Stabilization. Plus, with an optional adapter, you can shoot with the entire Canon EOS EF 35mm lens line.



But, of course, lenses aren't all that set the L2 apart. It also comes with some of the most advanced postproduction edit-

**L2** HI 8 VIDEO  
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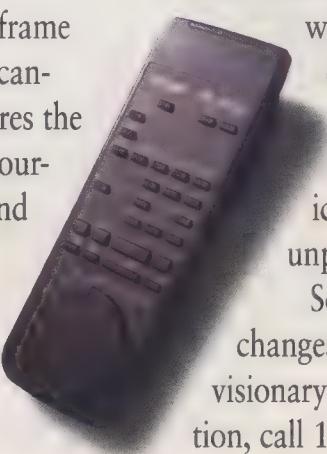
ing features ever built into a camcorder. Including RC Time Code for precision frame editing, and advanced date and index scan-and-search functions. And the L2 features the first camcorder remote control with a four-speed shuttle dial for precise forward and reverse playback control.

In addition, the L2 offers six digital creative effects, including two-time image magnification, dissolve and wipe scene transitions, and four

slow shutter speeds — as low as 1/8 second. And with full manual image control you get exceptional low light performance.

Best of all, with its unique combination of Canon optics and electronics, the L2 delivers a picture quality unprecedented in Hi8 video recording.

So look into the Canon L2 with interchangeable lenses. And see what a truly visionary camcorder is like. For more information, call 1-800-828-4040.



## FAST FORWARD



**World War III?**  
*Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs* (left) and the T. Rex from *Jurassic Park* (above) will battle for video sales this fall.

## PAIK'S PEAKS

► He's been called "the father of video art" and a "cultural terrorist." He invented an early video synthesizer and a bra made of tiny TV sets that caused a scandal when an otherwise topless cellist performed while wearing it. For more than 30 years, Korean-American artist Nam June Paik has been creating outrageous, innovative video sculptures using video cameras, TV sets, VCRs, laserdisc players, videos and just about anything else connectible by wire. Now Paik's best has been published in *Nam June Paik* (Harry Abrams, \$49.50), a lavish and accessible survey of his career.

The book ranges from the intimacy of a stone buddha meditating on its own live image in a bronze-coated monitor to an epic tower of 1,003 TV sets, all carrying live broadcasts, that Paik designed for the 1988 Olympics. His TV sets appear in the guise of crosses, robots, aquariums, cathedrals, musical instruments and goofy-looking installations that challenge almost everyone's notions about art and electronics.

Nam June Paik brings together the best of these pieces through wonderful color photographs accompanied by essays from collaborators and critics. —Stan Pinkwas



## Seven dwarfs and a dinosaur

► Walt Disney Home Video has made it official: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the only Disney animated classic never released on home video, will finally hit stores this fall. (Specific street dates and prices were unavailable at press time.) The timing of this momentous release may result in an epic clash of the video titans that even Walt himself could never have imagined. MCA/Universal has not announced a video release date for *Jurassic Park*, the most successful movie ever made, but early fall seems a sure bet. So when the leaves begin to turn, expect to see Snow White do battle with Stephen Spielberg's dinosaurs for the distinction of all-time video sales champ. Disney's *Aladdin* currently holds the record with 24 million copies sold worldwide. —KK

## Feast your eyes

► For true virtual reality, forget about picture tubes, LCDs and other displays—why not scan the eyeball directly? Motorola Semiconductors has applied for a patent for "a display which writes an image directly on the retina of an eye" by means of a laser. According to the patent application, "the display includes a laser which produces a colli-

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The computer screen today is already HDTV-capable. Over time, this could develop into something very, very big."

— CLAUDE LEGLISE,  
director of multimedia  
marketing for Intel.

mated light beam that is modulated with video information and is scanned and directed through the eye pupil to produce an image on the retina. The scanning uses micro-machined mirrors, electro-optic or acousto-optic devices which are extremely small and require very low power." The accompanying drawing shows a semiconductor laser in a pocket pack connected by a fiber optic cable to a pair of eyeglasses, which has a scanner built into its temple. The laser beam reflects from the lens of the glasses into the eye.

Motorola wasn't interested in talking about the invention. A representative said it was "too early," but noted that "direct-view and virtual display will play an increasing role at Motorola in the future." The laser eyeball system, the spokeswoman noted, is "one of many avenues" being pursued. The U.S. government's Center for Devices and Radiological Health sets standards for permissible radiation, and any such device would be required to meet them, according to an official at the Center.

Patent applications in the United States aren't published—they're not considered public information until patents are granted. However, European patent applications are a matter of public record, and we found this one in the archives of the European Economic Community. —David Lachenbruch

## THE NUMBER

160

Gigabytes needed to store a Hollywood movie in digital form on the information super highway.

## A star is reborn

► Robert DeNiro—the press-shy actor's actor—is talking up a blue streak and no wonder: He's just become the actor's director with his directing debut, *A Bronx Tale* (HBO Home Video). "I've wanted to direct for a long time," he says. "But I was doing so many other acting things. Ultimately, I'd like to write and direct. It's a complete creation, you know?"

After being on both sides of the lens, DeNiro claims actors make the best directors: "They know the problems of acting." They also know the benefits of directing. "When you're the actor, you might be wallowing in the mud in a big dramatic scene. It's cold. You have no clothes on. It's miserable. And then the director can say, 'That was very, very



good. I'd just like you to do one more.' Meanwhile, he's bundled up in a big coat." DeNiro laughs. "As a director, you can stand there and direct."

—Tom Soter

## Small is beautiful

► Times have changed since movie-critic-turned-director Peter Bogdanovich made his breakthrough pictures in the early '70s. With movies like *The Last Picture Show* ('71) and *Paper Moon* ('73), Bogdanovich built a reputation as a filmmaker who could succeed with character-driven stories. (*The Last Picture Show* earned two Oscars.) In an interview intended to promote his latest work—another personal, small-scale movie entitled *The Thing Called Love* (Paramount Home Video)—the direc-

## TIMESHIFT TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE

"Just when we reached the promised land of lower prices—\$25 feature films, \$8 blank tapes, and \$300 VCRs—along comes the new 8mm videocassette format to screw things up. If 8mm video were to hit us this fall as a cheaper medium showing us a better picture and giving us capabilities absent from half-inch VCRs, we'd be all for it. But 8mm is being introduced by Kodak and three other firms to do what Beta and VHS do already...More than 4 million VCRs were sold in



May 1984

the U.S. last year, the biggest year yet. This year's pace is also brisk. And RCA's Herb Schlosser has just predicted that worldwide revenues of prerecorded videocassettes will top 10 billion by 1990...This month's top five sellers on videocassette are *Michael Jackson: Making the Thriller Video*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Jane Fonda's Workout*, *Staying Alive* and *Flashdance*...*Heaven's Gate*, the most maligned film of the last 15 years, is released this month on cassette. Whatever quibbles one may have with the process or personnel involved in its making, *Heaven's Gate* is a towering work of art and one of the few true epics of the American cinema...It had to happen eventually. For the last five years the laserdisc system was the lone player in the interactive game. But now RCA is making a challenge by offering the first interactive CED-format videodisc player. The race is on...Now here's a term for the '80s: "wireless cable." It's sort of akin to "simulated emergency"—a built-in contradiction. But Microband Corporation of America plans to initiate airwave transmission of instructional programming later this year."

tor was very outspoken about how the current Hollywood system favors the blockbuster-sized movies of recent years.

"The biggest problem now is how films are distributed," Bogdanovich says. "Every since *Jaws* opened nationally in 2,000 theaters in 1975, the studios want all pictures to open big. It's difficult for them to figure out what to do with a picture that requires a slower build and good word-of-mouth." And what if Bogdanovich were just beginning his career as a filmmaker in the fast-buck '90s? I



Action! Peter Bogdanovich directs Samantha Mathis on the set of Paramount's *The Thing Called Love*.

doubt *The Last Picture Show* would have been made today."

—KK

## Mounties nab laser pirates

► Counterfeit laserdisks have arrived, and they can be injurious to the health of your LD player. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police recently raided a grocery store in Vancouver's Chinatown and seized laserdisc copies of *Jurassic Park*. Steve Cartland, the agent who handled the raid for Canada's Film and Security Office, said that the same source offered laserdisc copies of *Indecent Proposal*, *Last Action Hero* and *Drag on: The Bruce Lee Story*, although no actual copies were found.

Cartland traced the discs to a factory in Shenzhen, China, originally built as a joint venture with Philips but now owned entirely by the Chinese government. They were smuggled into North America through the port of Vancouver.

The discs are thicker and heavier than U.S.-made laserdisks, but Cartland decided to have a peek at the copy, which he describes as "of very high quality, suitable for making any number of VHS copies." While doing so, he reports, the disc shattered inside his player, breaking into shards.

The label lists no manufacturer, and simply reads "Jurassic Park 1993." So far, his office has learned of no laserdisc pirates in the U.S. and the Canadian outbreak has been limited to the single raid in Vancouver.

—Bob Angus

## Late Breaking News

WITH ITS AV Macs, Apple has already brought home computing into the multimedia age (see "Multimedia Magicians" in this issue). But as we went to press, the company introduced a whole new line of computers that may revolutionize the way these machines are used in the home.

Each computer in the Power Macintosh line features a PowerPC RISC-based processing chip, making it faster and more powerful than any IBM PC-compatible computer on the market. The new models are completely backward-compatible — all current Mac software and hardware peripherals will work with the new machines. Souped-up Power Mac versions of many popular applications — including those used to produce video and multimedia — will be released over the next few months and should only up the ante for anyone interested in desktop production. And the three basic Power Mac models are all available in AV versions.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about the Power Mac line is that it ushers in a new era of computer compatibility. At the first public demonstration of these machines, held at New York's Lincoln Center, stock Power Macs easily ran DOS-, Windows- and Mac-based software, actually cutting and pasting material instantly between the three systems. This is good news for all computer users, but especially for those looking to get into CD-ROM but concerned about incompatibility: The Power Macs are capable of running CD-ROMs in all three common computer formats, according to an Apple spokesman. We can hardly wait.

FUJI PHOTO HAS DEVELOPED A promising new kind of video printer that synthesizes colors embedded in special heat-sensitive paper. Fuji's thermo-autochrome process uses no liquids and, unlike conventional dye-sublimation video printers, no color-bearing cartridges. An ultraviolet lamp triggers yellow, magenta and cyan layers within the paper as it rotates around a drum. The technology has been packaged in a compact, 13-pound device that can print a three-by-four inch color image in about 70 seconds. The printer accepts all conventional

video sources and personal computers. It's just been introduced in Japan, and plans for the U.S. are still to be announced.

ADD GOLDSTAR AND SAMSUNG to the list of manufacturers licensed to make 3DO hardware. (AT&T and Sanyo announced similar agreements early this year.) Creative Technology also signed an agreement with 3DO, this one to co-develop a plug-in card for computers that would allow DOS-based PCs to run 3DO discs. And you can expect a major advertising blitz for the fledgling multimedia format soon, as 3DO seeks to pave a private express lane on the information superhighway.

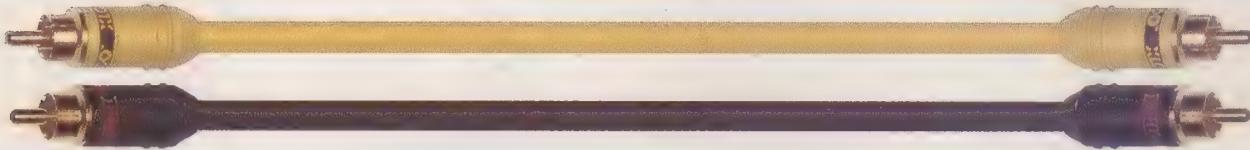
THE DSS SATELLITE-TO-HOME TV service that RCA and Hughes Electronics are launching this spring will include at least one radio station. WBBR-AM in New York will go to subscribers of Bloomberg Direct, a video channel aimed at financial professionals. WBBR already broadcasts a digital signal that can be received, stored and called up as needed by Bloomberg subscribers who lease special computer terminals.

WITH SEGA, PHILIPS, 3DO AND others now producing CD-based game/multimedia machines, Nintendo has fallen to the back of the technological pack. But next year, the company plans to zip right past the competition with a new system (code-named Project Reality) that uses 64-bit RISC processing and new silicon-based technology co-developed with computer manufacturer Silicon Graphics.

Like conventional game platforms, Project Reality uses a silicon-based ROM cartridge. The difference is that Project Reality cartridges will hold a minimum of 100 megabits of data — more than 10 times the capacity of typical game cartridges. Nintendo's reason for sticking with silicon? Speed — the company claims an access time two million times faster than that of current CD-ROMs.

IF YOU'RE TRYING TO CREATE champagne-quality video on a beer budget, check out *Video Magazine* contributing editor Cliff Roth's outstanding new book, *The Low-Budget Video Bible*. In it, Roth spells out everything you need to know to make video on the cheap, including format choice, lighting, sound, time code and editing tips. The book costs \$27.95; call 800-247-6553 for info and orders.

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## A/V receivers by Pioneer and Sony go for the GUI

GUI. Graphic User Interface. Pronounced "gooey." Invented by Xerox, perfected by Apple in the Macintosh, popularized by Microsoft in Windows, it's the point-and-click technology designed to make computers easier and more fun to use. And now, in what is sure to start a trend, there are two GUI-equipped audio/video receivers—Pioneer's \$2,000 VSX-D2S and Sony's \$1,700 STD-G1ES.



**Virtual Rack:** Pioneer's VSX-D2S lets users build "racks" of gear with an onscreen GUI interface.

VisionTouch—designed to make home theater easier and more fun to use. A noble aspiration, to say the least.

Generally speaking, both the Pioneer and Sony GUI systems live up to their PR, especially the ease of configuring the myriad esoteric sound enhancements each receiver offers. Both the Pioneer and Sony GUIs, once mastered, make it awfully easy and fun to twiddle, fiddle and tweak the sound.

The key words here, however, are "once mastered." Despite the "easy-to-use" interfaces, the two manuals that come with the Pioneer VSX-D2S are a daunting 82 combined pages; the dual Sony VisionTouch manuals add up to 50 pages. Even with the GUIs, these are still complex pieces of equipment with

more control options than you can easily learn and memorize.

With the VisionTouch, Sony, never shy where radical departures are concerned, breaks completely from the existing remote controller Zeitgeist. Every function and control of the receiver and all your other A/V components, is controlled by an egg-like "air mouse" remote with a single button. Welcome to ergonomic nirvana.

The egg is an RF (radio-frequency) device. After an RF antenna is plugged into the back of the receiver, a user need only wave the egg in the receiver's general direction to activate the onscreen menu and a pointing-finger cursor. A flick of the wrist moves the cursor. Once the finger points at the function you want to engage, simply click the single button on the egg.

The VisionTouch onscreen menu is actually a frame around the TV picture. Clicking on the "volume" frame bar reveals the receiver volume controls. Clicking on the "function" frame bar reveals a choice of input devices—laserdisc player, VCR, CD, etc.—which can then be clicked to choose a source. Clicking on the "sound" frame bar reveals 10 preset digital soundfields and all the twiddling and fiddling controls.

The bottom frame bar has a control panel for the source—the VCR panel, for instance, has a layout of transport control icons like play and fast forward. (The VisionTouch controls other components through an infrared emitter on its front panel.) When you set the egg down on its flat bottom, the menu disappears.

**Ergonomic Nirvana:**  
Sony's STD-G1ES, its "air mouse" and onscreen GUI.

The fly stuck in the VisionTouch GUI is the difficulty of setting it up to control other devices. This process entails holding each remote up to the receiver and pressing every function key until the VisionTouch memorizes each individual IR code signal. You can also create up to 20 user-definable custom commands. It's very time-consuming, and my arm got tired holding up the remote in the precise position relative to the receiver, but if I can control every device I own with an egg and one button, it's worth it.

Problem is, the VisionTouch is particular about which controls it memorizes. I tried storing commands from two VCRs and a laserdisc player, but in the middle of the second VCR, I got a "memory full" message. When I cleared and tried again, it refused to accept the codes from the laserdisc player remote. I reached for the manual.

"You may experience recording difficulties or reach the IR code capacity even before 80 IR codes," it explained. "For this reason, you should record the IR codes of the important commands first and skip the rest." Skip the rest? What's the point of a simplified GUI if I can't use it for all the commands for all my equipment?

The Pioneer VSX-D2S presents a more familiar, if relatively pedantic, initial operation. All the basic function controls are available on the more-or-less standard-issue universal remote.

*continued on page 35*



THIS IS THE HEART OF TOSHIBA'S  
REVOLUTIONARY VCR CHASSIS.



## INTRODUCING V3. ONLY FROM TOSHIBA.

Toshiba's quest to maximize VCR picture quality has led to the reinvention of the chassis design. Shown above is a cutaway view of Toshiba's new V3 head cylinder with built-in Flying Pre-Amplifier previously found only in professional studio decks. By placing the pre-amp directly in the head cylinder, the signal path is shortened considerably, thereby dramatically reducing picture noise.

But Toshiba didn't stop there. The revolutionary V3 chassis also incorporates a new Triple Noise Canceller for improved S/N ratio and intelligent Y/C separation for higher picture resolution. Combine these impressive advances with a long list of user-friendly features such as Intel-A-Play one step operation, Universal Remote Control and super high-speed fast forward and rewind, and you have a VCR that is indeed revolutionary.

Model M-760



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Toshiba America Consumer Products, Inc., 82 Totowa Road, Wayne, NJ 07470

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## NEW PRODUCTS

BY BRIAN CLARK

*Stylish storage and a cutting edge deck*



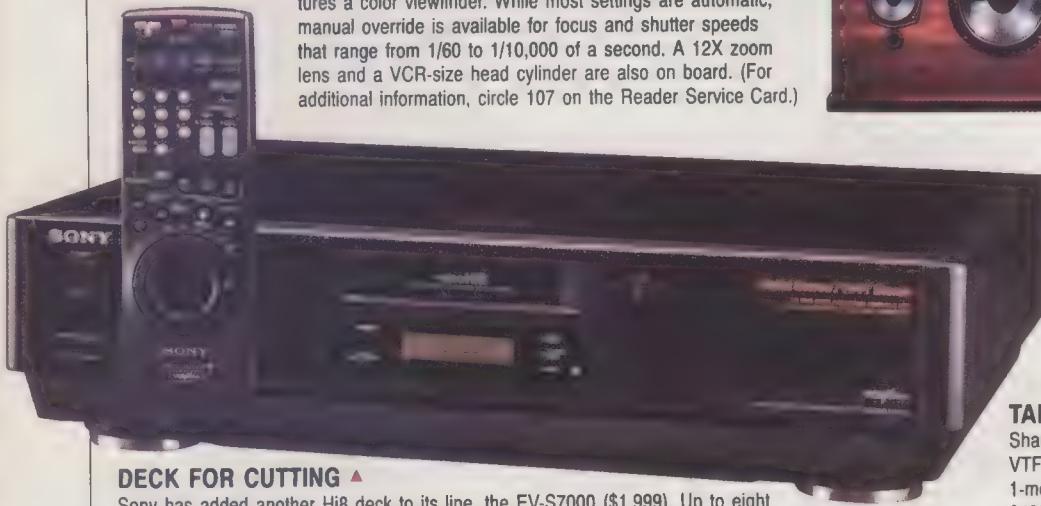
### ◀ HIGH IQ

The IQ Series of point-and-shoot camcorders was introduced last year by Panasonic. This year's line includes the PV-IQ404 VHS-C camcorder (\$999), which features a color viewfinder. While most settings are automatic, manual override is available for focus and shutter speeds that range from 1/60 to 1/10,000 of a second. A 12X zoom lens and a VCR-size head cylinder are also on board. (For additional information, circle 107 on the Reader Service Card.)



### ▲ NOW THAT'S FURNITURE

To simplify home theater, BIC America has created the Integrated Home Theater System. The System consists of a cabinet with built-in front and center speakers along with two 10-inch subwoofers. The cabinet has room for four components and a 35-inch or smaller direct-view TV. (For more information, circle 110 on the Reader Service Card.)



### DECK FOR CUTTING ▲

Sony has added another Hi8 deck to its line, the EV-S7000 (\$1,999). Up to eight edits can be programmed for automatic assembly with the accuracy of RC Time Code, which records frames in addition to hours:minutes:seconds. Additional features include digital PCM stereo audio recording and dubbing, and a digital timebase corrector. (For additional information, circle 101 on the Reader Service Card.)

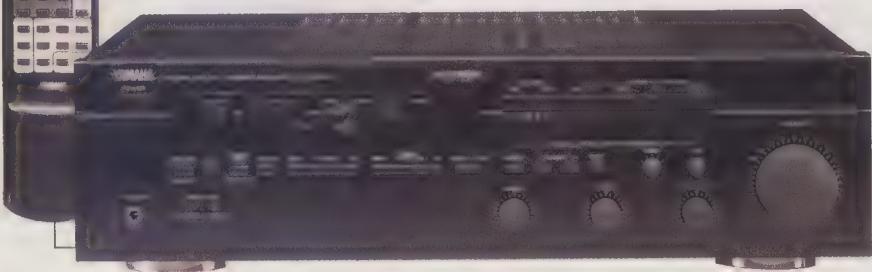
### TAKE IT WITH YOU ▼

Sharp's combination 13-inch TV/VCR (model 13-VTF100) has front audio/video inputs and 1-month/5-event VCR programming. It's priced at \$499. (For additional information, circle 106 on the Reader Service Card.)



### SURROUND FOR A SONG ▼

Priced at \$399, Yamaha's RX-V480 audio/video receiver offers features usually seen on higher-priced models. Six digital processing modes are available, including 35mm Movie Theater which creates phantom speakers along the right and left sides of your viewing area. (For additional information, circle 108 on the Reader Service Card.)



### IN THE MODE FOR FOG ▶

Minolta's C-570 VHS-C camcorder (\$1,275) features eight programmed auto exposure modes, including ones for special effects like fog and a sepia tone. In addition to a 10x zoom lens, the C-570 has 2x digital enlargement. Additional features include digital image stabilization, a built-in light, and a multibrand remote for the camcorder and a VCR. (For additional information, circle 104 on the Reader Service Card.)



### SANSUI PRO-LOGIC ▶

Sansui's AV 9000 DSP audio/video amplifier (\$899) features Dolby Pro-Logic decoding with five channels of amplification—80 watts each across the front and 20 watts per rear channel. Other features include preamp outputs, digital signal processing with theater and concert modes, onscreen display and a front input. (For additional information, circle 100 on the Reader Service Card.)



### SONANCE SOUND ▶

Sonance, maker of in-wall speakers for custom installations, has created stand-alone home theater speakers. Two powered subwoofers are available, the DL15 (\$899) and the DL10 (\$549), with 15- and 10-inch drivers respectively. Sonance's DualLevel circuitry in both subwoofers allows switching between a movie and a music source, optimizing low frequency output. (For more information, circle 103 on the Reader Service Card.)

### ► BATTERY PULSE

Sima's SPM-10 PowerMax Pulse Charge combines the discharge and charge cycles to recharge six-volt nickel cadmium batteries, reducing the time it takes to complete a full recharge. It comes with a car lighter cord. It's priced at \$79.95. (For additional information, circle 109 on the Reader Service Card.)



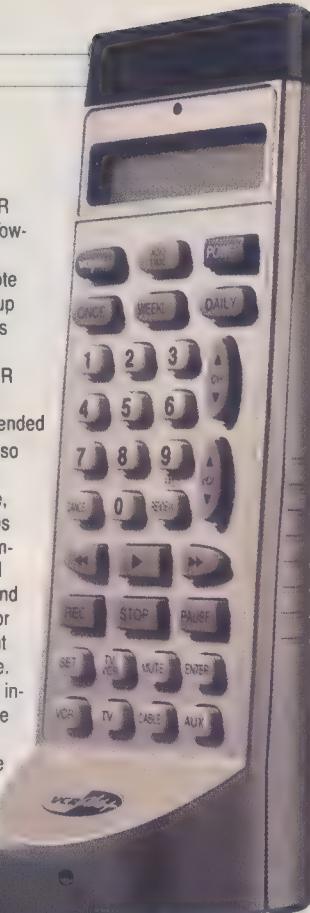
### DIRECT-VIEW WITH SURROUND SOUND ▶

Samsung's upgraded TV line includes the TXC3135, a 31-inch TV with MTS stereo with dbx noise reduction and surround sound. Additional features include front audio/video inputs, variable audio output jacks, auto channel programming and a sleep timer. (For additional information, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card.)



### POWER TOWER ▶

Gemstar's VCR Plus Control Tower (\$79) is a universal remote that replaces up to four remotes in addition to performing VCR Plus programming for unattended recording. It also has Gemstar's CallSet feature, which programs your cable company's channel designations and brand codes for your equipment over the phone. (For additional information, circle 111 on the Reader Service Card.)



## Dead again? Here's how manufacturers are solving your battery memory problems.

Every camcorder buff has had this experience: You've been shooting for about 30 minutes with a battery rated for one hour of charge for about 30 minutes when, suddenly, that dreaded message telling you your battery's almost dead appears in your viewfinder. Even if you planned ahead and brought along a spare (or four), haven't your batteries frequently seemed to die on you at the

moment it reached before being recharged. Once it drops to this voltage again, its power diminishes enough so that your camcorder will shut itself off. But in fact, battery memory is rarer than you might have been led to believe, and it's confined to nickel-cadmium (NiCad) cells, which are used mostly in 8mm and VHS-C camcorders.

In this column, we'll discuss the phenomena that are commonly mistaken for battery memory, and report on some of the steps battery manufacturers are taking to combat these problems.

What is often mistakenly referred to as battery memory may be nothing more than battery degeneration. As you discharge and recharge a battery, the metal plates inside the battery that react with the chemicals to produce electricity slowly erode. After a certain number of charges, they lose some of their capacity. Eventually, they lose the ability to hold a charge altogether.

How long this takes depends on which type of battery you're using, and how effective your recharger is at not "shocking" the battery's system. NiCads can, under ideal circumstances, be recharged as many as 1,000 times, although 500 recharges are more likely under normal use. The older lead-acid cells generally die out after 125 to 250 recharges.

Another common problem often blamed on "battery memory" is overcharging. Putting too much of a charge on a NiCad battery can cause the electrolytes to leak out, which lessens power capacity. This phenomenon is more prevalent with older rechargers that lack a computer-chip sensor to tell it how much charge the battery needs and can manage.

Preventing battery memory by trying to get your battery fully discharged may cause over-discharging, which would actually do it more harm than good. Running your battery all the way down reduces the battery's voltage to the point that it may not be able to recharge fully, especially if your recharger lacks a power sensor.

Older lead-acid batteries, still in use for many full-size VHS and S-VHS camcorders, are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon, although overdischarging has been noted to a lesser extent in NiCads as well.

Many companies are now introducing (or will soon introduce) products that solve these problems to some degree. Sunpak has recently come out with the RB-80UL and RB-80U Memory-Free NiCad batteries for use with most 8mm and VHS-C camcorders from Sony, Panasonic, JVC, Sharp and manufacturers with equivalent models. According to A.J. Gilson of ToCad America (parent company of Sunpak), the use of six 1.2-volt NiCad cells in place of the five cells used by other battery manufacturers is what makes its batteries memory-free.

"A properly discharged battery should only have between one and 0.9 volts per cell," says Gilson, "but most 8mm and VHS-C camcorders stop running when the entire battery has less than 5.5 volts in it." This means that, with a five-cell battery, the cells still have more than one volt per cell left while the battery, as far as the camcorder is concerned, is dead. The extra voltage per cell, Gilson explains, becomes a ceiling for the battery so that it can no longer accept a full recharge.

The Sunpak Memory-Free series, on



**No Memory?** Sunpak says a sixth cell in its RB-80U battery prevents memory problems.

worst possible moment? You've had to stop shooting for the amount of time you needed to power down, take out your "dead soldier," put in a fresh battery, and power back up again. Meanwhile, that once-in-a-lifetime shot you were in the middle of has passed you by.

If you're like most people, you mutter darkly about "battery memory" and swear that, next time, you'll make sure your battery's fully discharged before you recharge it again. As most camcorder buffs know, battery memory occurs when you don't discharge your camcorder battery fully before recharging it. The battery "remembers" the lowest voltage



**Latest In Lithium:** Sony's CCD-TR500 uses a lithium-ion battery.

the other hand, reaches one volt and below per cell while still providing enough voltage to run the camcorder. Also, since there is more voltage to start with, the batteries have 30 percent more capacity than standard batteries.

*continued on page 108*

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# THE PERSONAL VIDEO STUDIO

Circle 7 on Reader Service Card

## Can shelf systems cut it for home theater sound?

You see them in the paper every Sunday—ads promising home theater sound systems, complete with Dolby Pro-Logic, five speakers, a dual-well audio cassette deck and a CD player, all built into slick-looking racks or shelf systems, discounted for \$699 or \$799. Most serious video audiophiles would cut back to Spam sandwiches and generic beer before they'd buy such bargain-basement gear. But with so many features at such low prices, I had a hard time ignoring these budget systems. After all, how bad could they be?

Finally, the bargain-hunter in my soul won out over the video/audio geek, and I borrowed a DCS-

**Surround On A Shelf:**  
Fisher's DCS-994 shelf system with Dolby Pro-Logic (below) and its center/surround speaker (right).

you tweak up the system's frequency response. A wireless remote control operates most of the DCS-994's features, and also controls Fisher and Sanyo VCRs and TVs. The back panel offers stereo audio inputs for video and phono, and spring connectors for five speakers, plus an extra pair of connectors for a second set of main (left and right) speakers, which you could put in another room.

The DCS-994 comes with two

Fisher system in our big, 5,500-cubic-foot home theater room would be like expecting me to hold my own in a game of horse with Shaquille O'Neal. So instead, I created a new, real-world home theater room comparable to what the A/V buyer on a budget might have, complete with old carpet and a beat-up vinyl couch. (I'm hoping to complete the look with a La-Z-Boy and a neon Budweiser sign.)

The room measures 880 cubic feet, roughly the size of a small suburban bedroom—a perfect match for the DCS-994's capabilities. A few hand claps helped me hone in on the room's minor acoustic problems, which I cleaned up with RoomTunes and my homemade acoustic treatment devices.

Setting up the DCS-994 took only about 10 minutes—this is as close as you can get to plug'n'play home theater. You can adjust the channel levels from the remote or the front panel, and like all Pro-Logic gear, the DCS-994 offers a pink-noise test tone to help you balance the channels.

From a performance standpoint, the DCS-994 won't challenge systems based on A/V receivers—even the new crop of \$350 Pro-Logic receivers. The Pro-Logic decoder, the cassette deck and the CD player work fine for the price, and the main-speaker amps get the job done. But the feeble center- and surround-channel amps frequently produce audible distortion when asked to produce volume levels suitable for action movies. (I settled on a listening level with peaks of about 98 decibels—a healthy 7 dB below THX-mandated levels.)

The sound of the main speakers is decent for the price, and the tiny one-ways work okay for surround. Unfortunately, the one-way design doesn't work well for the center, which is the most important channel in a home theater system. Here, the one-way sounds like a cheap TV speaker. At home-theater volume levels, such a speaker is guaranteed to produce headaches. This is the system's Achilles' heel, the place where Fisher could make a big improvement without adding too much to the DCS-994's price.

In fact, simply replacing Fisher's center speaker with any passable \$99 center

*continued on page 94*



994 Pro-Logic shelf system from Fisher. The electronics half of the DCS-994 is a nifty, one-box system—the gold-colored feet under each "component" are phony. It incorporates a dual-cassette deck with Dolby B noise reduction, an AM/FM tuner, a 24-CD changer that lets you group CDs in categories like jazz and rock, and a Pro-Logic decoder with amps for left, center, right and surround speakers.

A little five-channel equalizer lets

three-way main speakers with eight-inch woofers, plus three small one-way speakers for center and surround channels. Fisher even provides hookup wire. That's everything you need for home theater except a stereo VCR and a TV, and the package lists for only \$999!

Fisher rates the DCS-994 at 100 watts per channel for the left and right, and 15 watts each for the center and surround channels. With so little power in the center, I knew that using the little

Imagine being able to assemble your home videos the same way you put together your photo album... keep your best shots, get rid of the ones you don't like and arrange them in any order. Now you can with JVC's GR-AX75U "Video Album Maker" compact VHS camcorder.

This brilliant new camcorder not only produces the highest quality images with its selection of advanced features; it lets you select which shots you want to keep and the order in which you want to keep them!

Lots of camcorder makers tell you how good they can make your videos before you shoot; JVC lets you make better videos even after you shoot. That's because we invented VHS.



# Make your own video albums.



\*Besides its "Video Album Maker" (Random Assemble Edit) function, the GR-AX75U features ■ 20-to-1 digital zoom; Image Stabilization for ultra-stable videos and 8 Program Auto Exposure modes to ensure the best picture quality under all types of shooting conditions.



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**JVC**  
The Inventor of VHS.

## Shaken tapes & dry cleaners

**Q**In past issues, you've mentioned companies that repair broken videocassettes. Since I live very close to the epicenter of January's Northridge, California earthquake, I now find myself with a dozen or so broken shells in need of repair. Can you print the name of some companies that can fix them?

Sol Weintraub  
Reseda, California

**A**I know just what you mean. I also live in California, and hundreds of VHS, Beta and 8mm videocassettes ended up on my floor. Many were damaged, not just from the initial impact of the quake, but also the inevitable necessity of stepping on many of them to get into my video room to retrieve and repair other valuables with a higher priority. I've been able to do "shell swaps" for years, replacing broken components with new ones from other shells. Now that blank tape is so inexpensive (typically under \$2 for even brand-name T-120s), it's cheaper to simply cannibalize a new tape to save an older one with an important recording.

For those who would rather have repairs done for them, here's a company that has been fixing broken audio and videocassettes for years: It's Advanced Video, 6753 Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood, CA 90038. Write for prices and turn-around times.

**Q**I've gotten conflicting stories from friends and dealers about the correct way to clean the video heads in my 8mm camcorder. Some say a wet cleaner is the best method, while others suggest that only a dry tape cleaner be used. What's the real story? Jim Gallo

New Orleans, Louisiana

**A**While wet-type cleaning cassettes, under a variety of brand names, are available for the 8mm format, my advice mirrors that of most 8mm hardware manufacturers—don't use them. Sony, for example, specifically cautions against using wet cleaners on its 8mm hardware, recommending its own V8-25CLH dry head cleaner.

Many wet cleaners employ a coarse fabric tape or ribbon to hold the cleaning solvent. The ribbon is much thicker and rougher than the 8mm tape, which

is a scant 10 to 13 microns thick. There's just too much risk of damage to the smaller and delicate parts found in 8mm gear (not to mention the video heads themselves) to warrant the use of these cleaning tapes.

If a head clog resists cleaning by means of a dry tape cleaner, then a professional head cleaning may be called for. A competent technician can clean heads using appropriate solvents, lint-free swabs and considerable care.

As a final thought, consider the case of a friend who used a wet head cleaner in his CCD-TR81 camcorder. It destroyed the heads on the video cylinder, which had to be replaced. He gave me the old unit as a souvenir. It makes a great paperweight.

**Q**Last Christmas, I got a Panasonic Palmcorder that has a switch for 20-, 30- or 40-minute tapes. So far, I've only been able to find 30-minute tapes, which I can also use for up to 90 minutes at the slow speed. Where can I find 40-minute tapes, which I assume will last for two hours at the slow speed?

David Riskin  
Santa Monica, California

**A**You can't, at least not yet. VHS-C tapes that last 20 minutes (or 60 at the EP recording speed) have been around for more than a decade, but are becoming harder to find now that longer 30/90-minute tapes have arrived. Lengthening the tape meant making it thinner: While a 20-minute tape is 19 to 20 microns thick, a 30-minute tape is 15 to 16 microns. Making a 40/120-minute tape would require a basefilm of only 11 to 12 microns, possibly less.

JVC in Japan has just developed a T-210 VHS tape that may be sold in the U.S. in the near future. Using a super-strong basefilm material, it may be sturdy enough to survive spooling onto a VHS-C cassette, creating a commercially viable TC-40 cassette. Meanwhile, you'll have to stay with the 20- and 30-minute tapes.

*Video Magazine welcomes your questions. Address queries to Q & A, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.*

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**C**T-Al Franklin's: Hartford> Carlton's A/V: Danbury.  
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**D**C Suburbia: Audio Buys.

**D**E-Sound Studio: Dover, Newark, Wilmington.

**D**F-Absolute Sound: Winter Park> Audio Ctr.: Ft. Lauderdale.

**A**udio Video: Tallahassee> Audio Video Interiors: Melbourne.

**I**nvisible Audio: Pensacola> Hoyt Stereo: Jacksonville> Sensuous Sd: Tampa> Sound Components: Coral Gables> Sound Ideas: Gainesville> Sound Insight: Ft. Pierce> Stereotypes: Daytona> Stereo World: Ft. Myers, Naples> Stuart A/V: Stuart.

**G**A-Stereo Shop: Martinez> Stereo Video Systems: Marietta.

**H**I-Audio Center: Honolulu> Classic Audio: Honolulu.

**I**A-Audio Logic: Des Moines> Camera Corner: Davenport.

**H**awkeye: Iowa City, Cedar Falls.

**D**ID-Good Ear: Boise.

**U**L-United Audio Centers: Chicago & Suburbs> Camera Center: Bloomington> Cars & Stereos: Rockford> Jon's Home Center: Quincy> Stereo Studio: Palatine> Select Sound: Naperville> Sterling Elect.: Sterling> Sundown One: Springfield.

**I**N-Ovation Audio: Clarksville, Indianapolis.

**K**S-Accent Sound: Overland Park> Advance Audio: Wichita.

**A**udio Junction: Junction City.

**K**Y-Ovation Audio: Lexington, Louisville.

**L**A-Alterman Audio: New Orleans, Metairie, Covington> Music Plus: Baton Rouge> Wright's Sound Gallery: Shreveport.

**M**A-Goodwin Audio: Boston, Shrewsbury> Nantucket Sound: Hyannis.

**M**D-Audio Buys: Annapolis, Gaithersburg, Laurel, Rockville, Waldorf> Cumberland Elec: Cumberland> Gramophone: Balliett.

**E**lliot City Soundscapes: Balliett> Sound Studio: Salisbury.

**M**E-Cookin': Portland.

**M**L-Pecar's: Detroit, Troy> Classical Jazz: Holland> Front Row A/V: Flint> Future Sound: Ypsilanti> Court St. Listening Room: Midland, Saginaw.

**M**N-Audio Designs: Winona> Audio Perfection: Minneapolis.

**M**Q-Independence A/V: Independence> Sd. Central: St. Louis.

**N**C-Audio Video Systems: Charlotte> Stereo Sound: Durham, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston-Salem> Audio Lab: Wilmington> Audio Video World: Rocky Mt.> Tri-City Electric: Conover.

**N**E-Custom Electronics: Omaha> Lincoln.

**N**H-Cookin': Nashua, Manchester, Newington, Salem, S. Nashua.

**N**J-Hal's Stereo: Trenton> Sound Waves: Northfield> Sasasfras: Cherry Hill> Woodbridge Stereo: W. Caldwell, W. Longbranch, Woodbridge.

**N**M-West Coast Sound: Albuquerque, Santa Fe.

**N**V-Evergreen Ear: Las Vegas.

**N**Y-Audio Breakthroughs: Manhasset> Audio Den: Lake Grove> Audio Expressions: Newburgh> Clark Music: Albany.

**S**yracuse> Stereo Exchange: Manhattan, Nanuet> Hart Electric: Vestal> Innovative Audio: Brooklyn> Listening Room: Scarsdale> Rowe Camera: Rochester> Sound Mill: Mt. Kisco> Yorktown Hts.> Speaker Shop: Amherst, Buffalo.

**O**H-Audio Craft: Akron, Cleveland, Mayfield Hts., Westlake> Audio Etc: Dayton.

**O**R-Bedford's HiFi: Eugene> Chelsea A/V: Portland, Beaverton> Kelly's Home Ctr.: Salem> Stereo Plant: Bend.

**P**A-Gary's Electronics: State College> GNT Stereo: Lancaster> Hart Electronics: Blahey, Kingston> Listening Post: Pittsburgh & suburbs> Sassafras: Bryn Mawr, Montgomeryville, Whitehall> StereoLand: Natrona Heights> Studio One: Erie.

**S**C-Dashboard: Charleston> Upstairs Audio: Columbia.

**T**N-Hi Fi Buys: Nashville> Lindsey Ward: Knoxvile> Modern Music: Memphis> New Wave Elect: Jackson> Sound Room: Johnson City.

**I**X-Audio Tech: Temple, Waco> Audio Video: College Station> Brock A/V: Beaumont> Bunkley's Sd. Systems: Abilene> Bjorn's: San Antonio> High Fidelity: Austin> Home Entertainment: Dallas, Houston> Klarity Clear: Dallas> Marvin Electronics: Ft. Worth> Sound Quest: El Paso> Sound Systems: Amarillo> Sound Town: Texarkana.

**U**T-AudioWorks: Salt Lake City> Stokes Bros.: Logan.

**V**A-Audio Buys: Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas.

**A**udio Connection: Virginia Beach> Audiotronics: Roanoke.

**S**tereotypes: Charlottesville.

**V**T-Audio Video Authority: S. Burlington.

**W**A-Audio Waves: Everett> Definitive Audio: Bellevue, Seattle> DESCO Electronics: Olympia> Evergreen Audio: Silverdale> Pacific St. & Sd.: Wenatchee> Tin Ear: Kennewick.

**W**VA-Sound Post: Princeton.

**W**I-Absolute Sound & Vision: Sheboygan> Audio Emporium: Milwaukee Sound World: Wausau.

**P**uerto Rico-Precision Audio: Rio Piedras.

**C**anada-Advance Electronics: Winnipeg> Audio Ctr.: Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City> Audio Design: Edmonton> Bay Bloor Radio: Toronto> Digital Dynamics: Clearbrook B.C.> Great West Audio: London> Lipton's: New Market Ontario> Peak Audio: Halifax> Sound Hounds: Victoria B.C.> Sound Room: Vancouver> Sound Station: Courtenay B.C.

**M**exico-Contact Grupo Volumen: Mexico City.

Definitive Technology®

# “Definitive’s Subwoofers Deliver Ultimate Bass Performance!”

*The extraordinary new PowerField™ 1500 features a 250-watt amp, fully adjustable electronic crossover and massive 15-inch driver for only \$995.*

## “A Show Stopper”

— Stereo Review

When Definitive set out to build the world's finest sounding subwoofers, our goal was to achieve the perfect synergy of powerful earth-shaking bass (for home theater) combined with a refined and expressive musicality.

First we developed our proprietary PowerField Technology which ensures superior high power coupling and unexcelled transient detail. Next we engineered the PF 1500's beautiful rock solid monocoque cabinet which houses our high current 250-watt RMS amplifier, fully adjustable electronic crossover and massive 15" cast-basket driver. The result is unsurpassed bass which thunders



*The PowerField 1500 (\$995) has been honored by winning Sound & Vision's highly coveted 1994 Critic's Choice Award.*

down below 15 Hz, yet retains total musical accuracy.

## Perfect for Your System

To ensure optimum performance, the PF 1500 has high and low level inputs and outputs plus adjustable high pass, low pass, volume and phase controls to allow perfect blending with any system and ultimate bass response in any room.

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# VIDEOTESTS



Pro Preampl Power: The M-760 uses flying preamps, a common feature in pro decks.



## TOSHIBA VHS VCR

common in professional VCRs. Flying preamps are built into the video head drum. This configuration boosts the weak signals coming from the heads before elec-

trical noise has much of a chance to contaminate them.

Toshiba is the first to build flying preamps into consumer VCRs, including the \$450 M-750, the \$600 M-770 (with editing features) and the \$550 M-760 reviewed here. All use Toshiba's new, simplified V3 chassis, which reduces the parts count to improve reliability.

In the M-760, Toshiba spiced up the feature package with an extra pair of heads optimized for the EP speed. These heads have a gap of 19 microns, a perfect fit for EP video tracks. Because they're used for both EP playback and SP and EP special effects, conventional EP heads have a gap of 26 to 31 microns, a compromise between EP recording qual-

### Toshiba M-760 VHS VCR



**Price:** \$550

**Weight & Size (h/w/d):** 9.9 lbs.; 17 x 3-5/8 x 12-1/2 inches

**Tape Speeds:** SP, LP (play only), EP

**Video Heads:** 6

**Cue & Review Search:** SP 5x, 9x; EP 15x, 27x

**Fast Forward/Rewind Time:** less than 2 min. for 120-min. tape

**Jacks:** front—video/stereo audio input, cable box control output; rear—video/stereo audio input and output, RF input and output

**Edit Protocol:** none

**Program Start Locator/Index/Cue:** index with auto/manual mark and bidirectional search

**Audio:** linear mono, hi-fi AFM stereo

**Cable Tuning Range:** 125 channels; A-8, 2 to 13, A to W, AA to BBB, 65 to 94, A-5 to A-1, 100 to 125

**Timer:** 6-event/1-month

**Clock/Timer Battery Backup:** 10 secs.

**Key Features:** 19-micron EP heads, VCR Plus with cable box control, auto switching to EP to fit programs on a tape, 2x speed play with sound, index search, Intel-A-Play

#### RESULTS

**Horizontal Resolution:** 240 lines

**Picture S/N (dB):** unweighted video 43.2

SP, 41.7 EP, 41.7 19-micron EP; weighted video 47.4 SP, 47.6 EP, 47.7 19-micron EP; chroma AM 45.6 SP, 40.9 EP, 41.8 19-micron EP; chroma PM 40.9 SP, 37.7 EP, 38.9 19-micron EP

**Audio Frequency Response:** hi-fi 20 Hz-20 kHz, +1/-2.7 dB; linear (-3 dB) 100 Hz-11 kHz SP, 100 Hz-3.5 kHz EP

**Hi-Fi Dynamic Range:** 81.3 dB

**Linear Audio S/N:** 42.7 dB

**Audio Distortion:** hi-fi 0.3%, linear 1%

#### RATINGS

**Picture:** very good

**Audio:** very good

**Overall:** very good

## HIGHLIGHTS

Toshiba's M-760 is one of the first consumer VCRs to use flying preamps, which are built into the video head drum to reduce picture noise. Special 19-micron heads improve the picture at the EP speed. The deck also offers VCR Plus with cable box control through an emitter on the top panel (a wired emitter is optional), double-speed play with sound and a new feature called Intel-A-Play, which makes playing a tape a two-button operation. We rate picture, sound and overall performance very good, making the M-760 competitive with other decks in its \$550 price range.

ity and SP effects quality. Adding the extra EP heads eliminates this compromise and raises the quality of EP playback. A switch selects between the two sets of EP heads; you may want to use it when playing EP tapes recorded with conventional EP heads.

Leading the list of other features is VCR Plus with cable box control, which this year has become almost standard-issue on better VCRs. This feature lets you program both your VCR and your cable box by hitting the VCR Plus button on the remote, then punching in a four- to seven-digit code from TV Guide or your local listings. The M-760 has an infrared emitter on the top that controls a cable box. Thus, your cable box has to sit atop the VCR, and you may have to experiment with positioning the box to receive the M-760's infrared signals.

If for some reason you can't place your cable box above your VCR, you

## HIGHLIGHTS

Memorex's Model 17 combines the convenience of 8mm tape with a five-inch CRT TV. It operates on AC or 12-volt DC, so it's ideal for use in automobiles or RVs. It lets you watch and record TV broadcasts and watch movies or TV shows recorded on 8mm tape. The Model 17 lacks some features you might expect, like a remote control, a recording timer and battery power. We rate picture, audio and overall performance good. Memorex prices the Model 17 at \$800, a price much lower than those of Sony's Video Walkman products. However, the Sonys are much more compact, and offer many more features.

can use an optional cabled emitter, which lets you put the cable box almost anywhere you want. However, the jack for the cabled emitter is inconveniently placed in the front-panel control compartment. It would have been better to have the jack on the rear panel, out of sight. If you use the cabled emitter, you'll have to leave the control compartment door open, and the cable will stick out and look unattractive.

Toshiba targets the M-760 for the home theater/timeshifting crowd. It has no editing features, but it does offer two features designed to make it easier to play prerecorded tapes. First, there's its front-panel shuttle dial, which allows quick access to all of the M-760's slow motion, play and search speeds — just twist the dial to find the speed you want.

Second, there's Intel-A-Play, a new feature intended to facilitate one-button operation of the M-760 and a TV set. Setting up Intel-A-Play is confusing — the manual never explains exactly what the feature does. Intel-A-Play turns on your VCR and TV, and selects the proper input on the TV, but it seems to perform only one operation at a time.

The basic idea is that you push the Intel-A-Play button repeatedly until a blue screen appears on your TV with a "ready" message. Those who are totally intimidated by anything electronic may like this feature, but anyone reading this will probably have an easier time just turning on the components and selecting the input manually.

Other interesting features include bidirectional index search with auto and manual index marking. This makes it easy to find the start of recordings, or any other point you mark on the tape. The VCR will automatically switch speeds from SP to EP to fit a timed recording onto the available tape. Hitting the play buttons while a tape is playing puts the deck into double-speed play with sound, but the audio is also doubled in pitch, so it sounds like Alvin and the Chipmunks.

The remote also operates most brands of TVs and cable boxes. The remote's best feature is a ring of controls with play on top, stop on bottom, rewind/search at left and fast forward/search at right. The controls have

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## MEMOREX 8mm TVCR

portable TV/VCR combinations (like Sony's Video Walkman 8mm TVCRs) cost as much as a mid-priced camcorder. With its Model 17 8mm TVCR, Memorex brings the price of personal video down to \$800, which is not exactly cheap, but is certainly within the reach of many videophiles.



On-The-Go Video:  
Memorex's Model 17  
(left) and its control  
panel (above).

The Model 17 combines an 8mm VCR and a five-inch CRT (tube-type) TV in a small chassis that weighs less than nine pounds. There's a single three-inch speaker on the side. You can power the unit from 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC. It comes with a large AC adapter that snaps on the back, and a DC cord for use in autos (there's a 12-

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# VIDEOTESTS

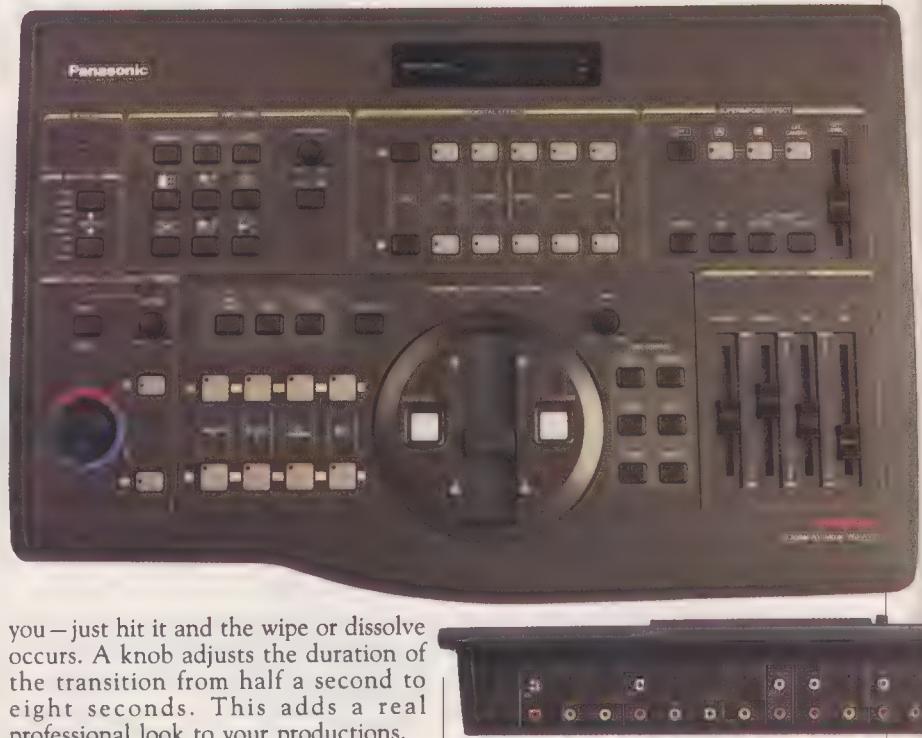
VIDEOTEST  
731

## PANASONIC A/V mixer

of home video editing setups. Panasonic has been the leader by far in the field, and its latest mixer, the WJ-AVE7, represents a big step up from its predecessor, the WJ-AVE5.

The WJ-AVE7 has two main S-video/video/stereo audio inputs. Each input can be assigned to the WJ-AVE7's A or B bus. The mixer allows you to switch between them, dissolve between them (one fades up as the other fades down) and wipe between them (using one of 96 patterns). You can also do picture-in-picture, and dual PIP — two small picture windows side-by-side, framed against a color background. It performs these tasks by running each signal through a digital field buffer, then synchronizing the buffers so you don't get a picture roll when switching.

The big improvement the WJ-AVE7 offers over the WJ-AVE5 — outside of its picture quality — is its auto take button. On the WJ-AVE5, you have to perform wipes with a sliding control, which often results in jerky wipe motion. The WJ-AVE7 has a slider, but it also has an auto take button that performs the task for



you — just hit it and the wipe or dissolve occurs. A knob adjusts the duration of the transition from half a second to eight seconds. This adds a real professional look to your productions.

You select the wipes with nine buttons on the top left. Each button provides several patterns with repeated pushes — you'll have to remember which button has which wipes, or keep the manual handy. Wipes can have hard or soft edges, or a colored border. The wipe patterns on the WJ-AVE7 are fairly simple, not as sophisticated as those on Sony's \$2,800 XV-D1000 or Videonics' upcoming \$1,200 MX-1. You can move the box, diamond and circle wipes around (if, for example, you want to focus on one part of the picture) with a positioning joystick on the lower left.

The joystick also controls color correction. You can color-correct each bus separately. A knob adjusts color level; the joystick adjusts hue. Using both, you

### Panasonic WJ-AVE7 Digital A/V Mixer

Price: \$2,000

Weight & Size (h/w/d):  
6.6 lbs., 3-3/8 x 18-7/8  
x 12-5/8 inches

Inputs: 2 S-video/  
video/stereo audio,  
S-video/video for exter-

nal camera, auxiliary  
stereo audio, 1/8-inch  
mic jack, WJ-TTL5 titler  
jack

Outputs: 2 S-video/  
video/stereo audio, 1  
monitor video jack for  
each input, 1/8-inch  
headphone jack

Key Features: color  
correction, auto take,  
audio mixing with video  
follow, luminance keyer,  
96 wipes (with regular,

soft or colored border  
edges) picture-in-pic-  
ture, digital effects (still,  
strobe, mosaic, paint,  
negative), audio level  
meters

#### RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution:  
400 lines

Picture S/N (dB): un-  
weighted luminance  
47.8, weighted lumi-  
nance 56.8, unweighted  
video 48.8, weighted

video 57, chroma AM  
53.3, chroma PM 49.8

Audio Frequency Re-  
sponse: 20 Hz-20 kHz,  
+0.02/-1.46 dB

Audio S/N: 77.2 dB

Total Harmonic Distor-  
tion: less than 0.002%

#### RATINGS

Picture: very good  
Audio: excellent  
Overall: very good

**FX Extraordinaire:** Panasonic's WJ-AVE7 audio/video mixer (top) and its front input panel (above).

### HIGHLIGHTS

If you edit your own videos, you need an audio/video mixer — a device that lets you dissolve or wipe between two video sources, mix audio, add effects, and more. Panasonic's WJ-AVE7 represents a significant improvement over the past model, the WJ-AVE5. To the AVE5's capabilities, the AVE7 adds a luminance keyer, color correction, auto take and audio follow. We rate the picture, sound and overall performance very good. At \$2,000, it seems a steal, but Videonics' upcoming MX-1 may redefine our price/performance standards in this category.

can go black-and-white or create monochrome effects, like sepia-tones. Having this feature built into the mixer saves you the expense (and degradation in picture quality) of adding a stand-alone color corrector.

Next to the switching slider, there's a fader section that lets you fade to black, white or one of six background colors. You can fade the audio along with the video if you wish, and there's an auto fade button that works much like

the auto take button.

The mixer also has a bank of digital effects for each bus. Each bank includes still, strobe (with five speeds), mosaic (with five pixel sizes), paint (with four levels of solarization) and negative. Built into camcorders, these digital effects seem pretty gimmicky to us. But with the added control you get with the WJ-AVE7, they become extremely useful. For example, you can set both the A and B busses to input 1, activate the mosaic on the B bus, and use a circle wipe to position a mosaic circle over a subject's face, thus disguising the subject as they do on "tabloid" TV news shows. The seemingly mundane still is actually even more useful—you can memorize a still from any point in a shoot, then dissolve into it to end a taped segment.

Panasonic's ads for the WJ-AVE7 show a tiny groom standing in a bride's hand. This effect is created with the mixer's luminance keyer, which throws out the lightest or darkest parts of a picture, and substitutes another picture. To produce the effect shown in the ad, you'd have to shoot the groom against a brightly lit white wall, then key his image over the shot of the bride.

You can use this keyer to blend video images in many creative ways, but be forewarned—lighting is extremely critical. Unless the groom in the above shot is lit perfectly, the edges of his body may show fringing (an effect you may have noticed on cheap cable-TV productions), and some of the image of the bride may leak through white areas, like his shirt. We find a chroma keyer—which lets you shoot the subjects against a blue screen, and which will be included in the MX-1—preferable.

Like the WJ-AVE5, the WJ-AVE7 offers a superimposer (known to pros as a downstream keyer). The superimposer has buttons to select its superimposing input—bus A, bus B or the WJ-AVE7's external camera input. The most common way of using the superimposer is to take a printed logo or a typeset or handwritten title, shoot it with a camcorder connected to the external camera input, then adjust the mixer's key level slider until the title appears (in black, white or one of six background colors) over whatever video is selected on the switcher.

You can also reverse the title, so the screen fills with the title color, and the video shows through the letters. You can switch the superimposed title on and off, or fade it in and out. You can also add two thicknesses each of outlines and shadows, as well as a drop shadow. If you have access to a desktop publishing setup (or even just some press-type), you can use the superimposer as a very ver-

satile titling system, and the creative effects you can get by using the superimposer on live images are terrific. The WJ-AVE7 also has a jack that interfaces the superimposer with Panasonic's WJ-TTL5 titler, but we don't recommend it—the titles look jagged and blocky.

The audio mixing section uses four sliders, one each for input 1, input 2, auxiliary (from the mixer's extra stereo audio input) and microphone (from the stereo mic jack on the front). The WJ-AVE7 offers audio follow, so the audio can be automatically switched along with the video if you wish. (On the WJ-AVE5, you have to do both manually.) If you're used to the juggling act it sometimes takes to operate the WJ-AVE5, you'll find this feature a godsend. The WJ-AVE7 also has stereo audio level meters, and adds a headphone jack with a level control.

This mixer—like all of them—presents a lot of options, and will take a long time to master. However, Panasonic's manual is pretty good, and anyone with a good grounding in video should be able to figure out the basics in 10 minutes. There's even a demo mode, activated by holding down the position/color joystick mode button when you turn the power on, that shows some of the mixer's best effects.

Our advice to a newcomer is to supply signals to inputs 1 and 2, and an odd-shaped, high-contrast picture through the external camera input and watch the demo over and over. It might even be useful occasionally to view the demo before a mixing session, and anytime you're in doubt about what transition will jazz up a scene.

While the WJ-AVE5 is an extraordinarily useful product, flaws in its picture quality sometimes make it impractical to use. The WJ-AVE7 isn't perfect, but it's a lot better. The 5's biggest problem is a darkening of images caused by insertion loss, or attenuation of the video signal. (If you attenuate—a video signal, the picture gets dimmer.) This makes the WJ-AVE5 difficult to use with poorly lit camcorder footage. The WJ-AVE7 has only a small amount of insertion loss, and for all practical purposes solves the problem.

Putting a multiburst pattern—six groups of vertical lines, each from left to right containing lines of decreasing thickness—through the WJ-AVE7 and into a waveform monitor (an oscilloscope specially designed for video signals) was very revealing. This type of pattern is used to gauge video frequency response. The groups of thinner lines represent the high frequencies; de-

continued on page 32

# Bogen 3140 Tripod



**For strength &  
versatility plus  
portability &  
affordability.**

Providing remarkable rigidity coupled with light weight (only 11 lbs., 6 oz.), the all-aluminum 3140 features double-strut, center-braced construction. Extends to 73" (with Mini Fluid Head) and folds to a compact 32½" for easy travelling.

Also available in black anodized finish, the 3140 is a natural for education and industrial use. Ask your dealer or complete the coupon below.

# bogen

We don't sell anything  
we wouldn't buy ourselves.

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Please tell me more  
about the 3140 Tripod

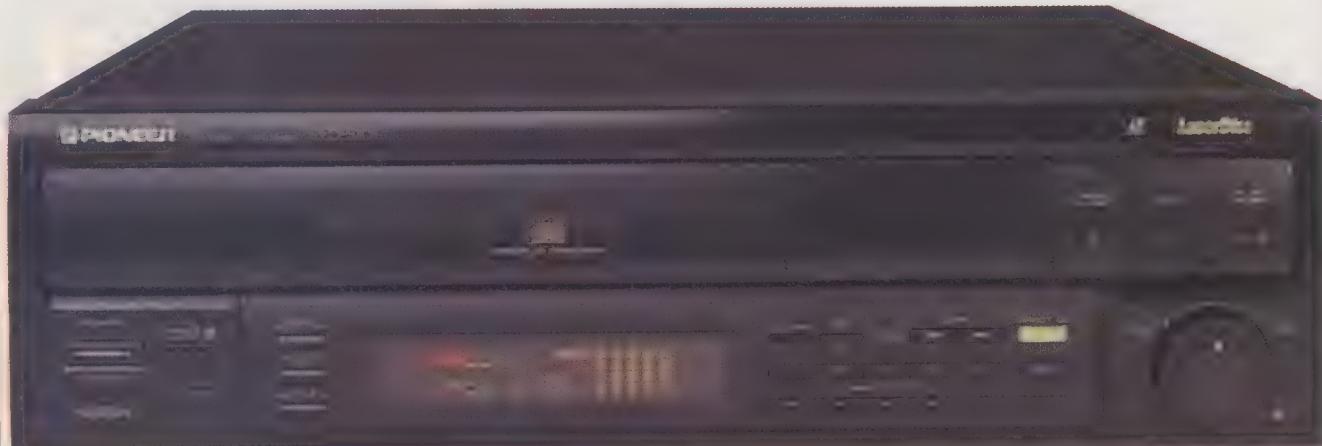
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# VIDEOTESTS



Double Drawer: Pioneer's CLD-S201 combi player has a small center drawer dedicated to CD playback. It operates faster than the large laserdisc drawer.



## PIONEER *combi* player

laserdisc players like Pioneer's \$2,500 CLD-97.

The reason? Simple, straightforward analog video circuitry. Many expensive

### Pioneer CLD-S201 Combi Player



Price: \$535

Weight & Size (h/w/d):  
18.4 lbs.; 4-7/8 x  
16-5/8 x 15-3/8 inches

Jacks: video/stereo audio output. DC output for optional RF converter, mono audio output, SR control input and output. CD-deck synchro

Disc Formats: 12- and 8-inch laserdisc. 5- and 3-inch CD. 5-inch CD-Video

Rapid Search: by time/frame, chapter/track and point A-B

Cue & Review Search:  
3x, 10x and 30x scan

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: point A,

Bottom-of-the-line laserdisc players represent one of today's best values in video. They cost about the same as a decent VHS hi-fi VCR, often discounting for as little as \$300. But they often deliver picture quality bested only by very expensive

players use digital field memory to produce clean search and still from CLV discs. That's a great feature, but unless the digital processing is done right (which costs big bucks), the result is noticeable picture degradation.

These attributes—low price, great picture—can be found in Pioneer's latest low-priced player, the CLD-S201. It has no high-end features—no automatic side-changing, no digital effects for CLV discs and no jog dial. Its only distinguishing feature is a special drawer that slides out for CDs. This drawer can be activated by pressing the CD Direct button on the player, which also shuts off all video circuitry to keep it from interfering with the audio. The small drawer op-

programmed chapter/track, or random chapter track; CAV frame or chapter: CLV/CDV/CD time or chapter/track

Analog Audio: hi-fi AFM stereo/dual mono

Digital Audio: pulse-flow, bitstream D/A converter; stereo/dual mono

Key Features: dedicated drawer for CDs, CD Direct mode, shuttle dial, digital audio level control, auto programming of CD tracks to fit audio cassette length

#### RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution:  
410 lines

Picture S/N (dB): unweighted video 47.6, weighted video 54.3, chroma AM 48, chroma PM 39.5

Audio Frequency Response: digital 10 Hz-20 kHz, +0.01/-0.38 dB; analog 20 Hz-20 kHz, +/-2.5 dB

Digital Audio Dynamic Range: 98.3 dB

Analog Audio S/N:  
73.6 dB

Audio Distortion: digital less than 0.003%, analog 0.024%

#### RATINGS

Picture: very good  
Audio: very good  
Overall: very good

## HIGHLIGHTS

Priced at only \$535, the CLD-S201 brings up the rear of Pioneer's extensive line of combi players. But don't dismiss it—it delivers more than respectable picture and sound, and a couple of interesting special features to boot. Like all combi players, it plays laserdiscs and CDs, but with a twist—a small drawer that opens just for CDs, which speeds up the player's operation. It has no digital effects or automatic side-changing, and its CAV scanning from the remote is poor. We rate picture quality, sound quality and overall performance very good. This is a solid choice for those seeking an entry-level laserdisc player.

erates more quickly than the big laserdisc drawer—it saves you about three seconds every time you load a CD.

Like most current laserdisc players without digital effects, the CLD-S201 offers a feature called clear scan, which alternates still frames and black frames when you scan through a CLV disc. Unfortunately the player also produces a clear scan effect when scanning through CAVs. Most players without digital effects produce smoothly speeded-up images when scanning CAVs. The CLD-S201 will scan CAVs clearly if you use the shuttle dial on the front of the deck, but it won't do it from the remote. We think Pioneer's implementation of CAV scan on the CLD-S201 is a mistake.

The rear jack panel carries only a bare minimum of outputs. There's a stereo audio output, and a video output

grouped with a mono audio output and a DC output. The video/mono audio/DC group is intended to connect to an optional RF convertor. The player has no RF input or output for connecting an antenna or cable. There's no S-video output (no great loss, in our book) and no digital audio output, so you can't use an external, high-quality digital-to-analog convertor for better sound. A pair of SR jacks allows the CLD-S201 to receive and relay infrared remote control command codes to other Pioneer gear.

The player offers all the usual laserdisc features, including A-B repeat (select start and end points of a segment, and the player will repeat it), intro scan (which lets you see—or with a CD, hear—the first few seconds of each chapter or track), multiple-speed play of CAV discs from 3x to 1/90x, and programmed playback of up to 24 chapters or tracks. There's also compu program editing, which rearranges CD tracks to fit the maximum number in a specified time, which is great for dubbing to audio cassettes.

We've never seen a laserdisc player remote as dinky as the one with the CLD-S201. It has no 10-digit keypad for direct chapter/track access, but it does access all the other basic features you expect, including random play, audio select (digital/analog, stereo/left/right), digital audio level control, and multi-speed play and frame step on CAVs.

The picture of the CLD-S201 is quite good—we found no significant visible artifacts, and our lab measurements revealed no problems. The noise was practically unnoticeable, except for the chroma PM noise, which causes red areas to turn purple in places. But that's a malady common to all laserdisc players. A multiburst test pattern revealed a gradual high-frequency roll-off, resulting in slightly lower resolution than top players like the CLD-97 produce. However, this decrease isn't particularly noticeable except on test patterns.

The audio measured quite well and sounded likewise—the CLD-S201 is definitely a sonic step up from most low-priced CD players. We wouldn't call its sound high-end, but it does offer considerably more detail and ambience than most inexpensive digital audio devices. The CD Direct mode produced no measureable improvements, but it did sound a bit better, with slightly more sense of the acoustics of the recording venue (audiophiles call this "air").

We rate the CLD-S201 very good overall. If you're a big CAV fan, you'll probably find its strange CAV search knocks it out of consideration for you. But if, like most people, your disc collection comprises almost all CLVs, you'll probably like the CLD-S201. ■

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## A/V MIXER

continued from page 29

creases in the signal strength of these groups (and the detail of the picture) cause them to appear shorter on the waveform monitor.

Panasonic's \$3,500 WJ-MX30 — a true professional mixer — produces almost perfectly uniform groups, while the WJ-AVE7 attenuates the three groups on the right side significantly. But the WJ-AVE5 cuts these groups off almost completely, and even attenuates two groups on the right side.

In terms of picture quality, this means that the WJ-AVE5 seriously compromises detail. The WJ-AVE7 isn't perfect — as the multiburst shows, it's clearly losing some detail. But subjective A/B comparisons between the WJ-AVE7 and an unprocessed signal show only a very slight reduction in detail. The only obvious artifact the WJ-AVE7 adds is a bit of noise in both the luminance (brightness) and chroma (color) signals. Overall, the WJ-AVE7 doesn't quite match the picture quality of the WJ-MX30 or Sony's XV-D1000, but it's a big step up from the WJ-AVE5, and more than good enough for any consumer and most semipro editing projects.

It's worth noting that the mixer throws away the sync signal of the incoming video and substitutes its own sync. This is both a curse and a blessing — it won't pass VITC (vertical interval time code) onto the output, but it will eliminate many problems caused by defective sync. The signal it puts out is very stable, good enough to feed a Video Toaster. However, because the WJ-AVE7 lacks the WJ-AVE5's preview output, you can't use it to synchronize two sources for feeding two channels of a Toaster.

We don't consider sound quality a make-or-break concern in a device like this, because the camcorder tapes most home videographers will be putting into it usually sound mediocre in the first place. Here, the WJ-AVE7 is way more than good enough for consumer editing. With its nearly flat frequency response, very low distortion and respectably low noise, the WJ-AVE7 won't present any sonic problems.

Crosstalk between open channels and closed channels with their level controls at minimum is less than -80 dB. The audio level controls have 12 marked graduations along the length of each slider. Unity gain (no signal boost or cut) is at about the 10th position, with about 4 decibels of gain at the 12th.

We rate the WJ-AVE7 very good

overall. Its picture and sound quality are satisfying, much better than those of the WJ-AVE5. We prefer its feature package to that of Sony's XV-D1000, and its old-fashioned, knobs-buttons-and-sliders control layout is much more convenient than the menu-based controls on Videonics' MX-1. However, the prototype version of the MX-1 that we've tried offers many more features at a price \$800 lower. We think the WJ-AVE7 strikes the best price/performance balance of all the mixers now available. But if the picture quality of the production versions of the MX-1 turns out to be as good as that of the WJ-AVE7, the Videonics unit will make the WJ-AVE7 look overpriced. ■

## VHS VCR

continued from page 27

rounded surfaces, so they create an indentation in the middle. Your thumb fits into the indentation naturally, and you can operate the controls without looking, or in the dark.

When it came to evaluating the video performance of the M-760 — and its flying preamps — we were stymied because of course, there's no way to use the deck with and without the flying preamps. So we compared its measurements to those of another Toshiba deck we recently tested, the \$450 M-659 ("Videotests," Nov. '93). We also compared the M-760 side-by-side with JVC's \$600 HR-VP700 ("Videotests," Apr. '94), plugging both into a Sony XBR<sup>2</sup> TV with test patterns and a movie clip recorded on both decks.

Surprisingly, the M-760's measured performance isn't really any better than the M-659's. However, compared on a TV with the HR-VP700 (the best VHS deck we've tested recently), the M-760 held its own. The M-760's picture was noisier than that of the HR-VP700, particularly in chroma AM noise, which produces variations in color intensity. But the M-760's picture seemed to have slightly more detail. This is a common trade-off in video — boost the sharpness and you increase noise. Overall, we prefer the HR-VP700's picture at SP, but it costs \$50 more than the M-760.

The 19-micron EP heads do their job well. They have little effect on video signal-to-noise ratios, but they increase chroma S/Ns by about one decibel. We slightly preferred the M-760's EP recording and playback to that of the HR-VP700. If, like many people, you like to timeshift in EP, the M-760 should be a good deck for you.

Clearly, the M-760's flying preamps don't produce miraculous improve-

ments, but this deck does put out a nice picture for the price—we rate it very good. The audio also rates very good, with very flat frequency response. The only unusual sonic characteristic we noticed was very limited (to 3.5 kilohertz) high frequency response on the linear track at EP.

We rate the M-760 very good overall. If you're looking for a deck in the \$500 range for timeshifting and home theater, it's a good choice. ■

## TV/VCR

*continued from page 27*

volt DC power jack on the back).

Because it has no provision for battery power, you can't use the Model 17 on an airplane (not that you can use much of anything on a plane nowadays). It's best suited for use in cars and RVs, as entertainment on long trips—the Model 17 and a few Disney movies dubbed to 8mm are a sure-fire way to keep the kids quiet in the back seat. Its small chassis also makes it ideal for use in the office or study.

The biggest inconvenience of using an 8mm transport in a TVCR is that prerecorded 8mm cassettes are tough to come by and almost impossible to rent. To get viewing material for the Model 17, you'll probably end up dubbing movies from VHS tapes or laserdisks, or recording TV shows to watch later. It plays SP and LP tapes, but records only at the SP speed; new tapes have extended maximum SP recording time to three

hours. And of course, you can use the Model 17's tuner just to watch TV.

Unfortunately, the Model 17 doesn't have a timer, so you can't collect shows by timeshifting. The unit also lacks a remote control, but when you're watching a five-inch screen, you're usually sitting close enough to reach the controls. It also lacks a second tuner (so you can watch one show while recording another), stereo sound and auto rewind, and

### Memorex Model 17 8mm TVCR

**Price:** \$800

**Weight & Size (h/w/d):**  
8.8 lbs.; 7-1/4 x 6-1/2 x 12 inches; 13-1/2 inches deep with AC adapter

**Screen Size:** 5-1/8 inches diagonally

**Speaker Size:** 3-inch round

**Broadcast Tuning Range:** 2 to 13, 14 to 69

**Cable Tuning Range:**  
125 channels

**Jacks:** video/audio input and output, RF input, 1/8-inch headphones

**Tape Speeds:**  
SP, LP (play only)

**Video Heads:** 2

**Cue & Review Search:**  
(non-locking) forward 9x, reverse 7x

**Fast Forward/Rewind Time:** 8-1/4 min. fast forward, 8-3/4 min. rewind for 120-min. tape

**Edit Protocol:** none

**Audio Frequency Response:** VCR 20 Hz-20 kHz, +0/-4 dB; speaker 200 Hz-8 kHz, -3 dB

**Hi-Fi Dynamic Range:**  
73.1 dB

**Audio Distortion:** 0.4% from line out

### RATINGS

**Picture:** good  
**Audio:** very good from line out, fair from speaker

**Overall:** good

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unlike Sony's Video Watchman TVCRs, it doesn't have a LANC edit control jack. But the only feature we really wish Memorex had included is the timer.

The unit is simple to operate. All controls are on the front of the top panel for easy access. The TV controls are at the front edge, with two rows of VCR transport controls behind. All the usual transport functions are there (play, stop, etc.), as well as buttons for counter reset and memory, input select and monitor off, which extinguishes the monitor but leaves the VCR running. Picture adjustments are made through select and up/down buttons; an onscreen display shows you the adjustment scales.

The unit has video/audio inputs and outputs, so you can record from other video sources and output signals from the VCR to a larger TV. The rear panel has an RF input for connecting cable TV or an antenna. There's also an earphone jack on the side, and a telescoping rod antenna on top. The tube is covered with a protective screen that also enhances contrast. A foot on the bottom lowers to prop up the front of the Model 17.

The Model 17 also has buttons for

channel select and preset. The preset button lets you scan automatically for active channels, and locks out inactive channels — that's important for a device that has no numerical keypad for direct access to a specific channel. However, the scan preset stays in memory only as long as the power is connected — disconnect the AC or DC power, and the Model 17 forgets the scan sequence.

When it comes to picture and sound quality, the Model 17 won't knock a Sony XBR<sup>2</sup> off its block, but for a personal video device, it does a decent job — we rate it good. We made our lab measurements from the video output jack, which produced quite a pleasing picture on one of our reference TVs.

The Model 17's own screen offers a nice picture for a five-inch screen, but you can see the pixel pattern if you view the picture from the recommended viewing distance, about five times the picture height. At the factory presets for contrast, brightness, color and tint, the picture is good, but we preferred to tone down the color one notch, set the tint one notch toward green, and boost the contrast a bit.

The frequency response of the VCR is unusually broad for 8mm audio. From the line-level output, audio quality is very good, making the Model 17 a capable component in an A/V system. On our sample, the internal speaker buzzed, distorting the sound most noticeably in the middle of the volume range. However, we tried one of our test tapes on other samples at a few local Radio Shack stores, and none exhibited the same problem. They did sound like tinny little TV speakers, but that's probably the best one can do in such a small enclosure. We rate the sound fair overall.

The Model 17 may not be packed with features or performance, but if you want a tiny, affordable TVCR to take on the road with you, it should prove more than up to the task. Bring along a few movies dubbed onto 8mm, and you're sure to enjoy.

## TECH TIP

### Double duty

Make your Sony Walkman do double duty. Connect it to your stereo TV's unused RCA-type audio inputs, using a Radio Shack Y-adapter cord (stock number 42-2475). You'll be able to hear your favorite stereo radio stations through your stereo TV, and you can adjust the volume with the TV's remote control.

Gabriel Velez  
Syracuse, New York

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## HANDS-ON

continued from page 16

Unlike the VisionTouch, the VSX-D2S GUI is designed to be used less for basic operations than for twiddling, fiddling and tweaking, at which it excels. The remote controls practically any brand of gear but unfortunately, the GUI only controls other Pioneer equipment. And who has a Pioneer VCR, especially when Pioneer hasn't sold one for years?

Using the Pioneer GUI to tweak is easy and fun, and gives a consumer a wider variety of options than would be possible with a non-GUI system. It has four basic factory presets, three digitally processed settings (movie, concert and sports) plus straight stereo. There are also four user-definable settings that allow a consumer to build and design systems by adding and tweaking various "components"—graphic depictions of racks that can be filled with a Dolby Pro-Logic decoder, and other circuits.

Adjusting the settings of the components is a matter of simply moving the cursor via an up-down-left-right video-game-type controller on the remote to

select a component, then clicking on-screen plus and minus keys. These perform a range of functions, including adjusting functions like channel levels, surround delay time and bass boost. And once the twiddling and tweaking is complete, you can name your system via the onscreen GUI keyboard. I named my Pro-Logic setting "Arthur."

The Pioneer VSX-D2S has one annoying flaw, however—it does not have a preset Dolby Pro-Logic setting. In other words, if Mom wants plain Pro-Logic, she'd have to "design" a four-channel Pro-Logic system, adding a Dolby Pro-Logic decoder to an amplifier in one of the four user-definable systems. In this respect, forcing a user to "design" the most important setting makes the VSX-D2S more difficult to use, not easier.

Both the Pioneer and Sony GUI receivers share two further drawbacks. First, if you want to tweak the sound while just listening to music, you have to have the TV on. With the Pioneer, though, you can control the volume from the remote without using your TV or the GUI. Second, neither has keys dedicated to a cable box, which means you're forced to program the cable box remote functions into a set of controls

designed for another component.

In terms of aural performance, both sounded nearly as good as my Denon AVS-3020 in Pro-Logic, and just as good in stereo. In terms of operation, the VisionTouch took a bit longer to hook up because of the RF antenna and IR repeater. The VisionTouch is smart, however—when switching from a video source with a digital soundfield to an audio source (like CD), the receiver automatically switches to two-channel stereo. It's filled with common-sense features like that. The VSX-D2S is more flexible, however. Along with memorized acoustic settings, it offers multi-room/multisource capability.

Should you buy one of these receivers for the GUI pleasure? Both are easy to teach someone how to use, but difficult to set up. So if you can handle the setup, I'd say yes. The VisionTouch is a fascinating and inventive first attempt at a radical concept. It has great possibilities, but ultimately falls short of its promise because of the difficulty in programming it. The Pioneer, however, though more pedantic in its approach and minus a Pro-Logic preset, presents a gradual transition to what promises to be an increasingly GUI world. ■

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But just because we're leaving the comfort of home for the rough-and-tumble ruggedness of the outdoors doesn't mean we should leave our video gear behind. After all, how can you truly capture the excitement of action sports but with moving images?

In fact, learning to shoot outdoor video will probably be much easier than learning most outdoor sports. All you have to do is take a few simple precautions and, perhaps, adopt a slightly different approach to shooting. To help you



bring the fun of outdoor sports home on tape, we asked some of our hardier contributors — many long-time outdoors enthusiasts — to share the shooting techniques and strategies they've learned (often the hard way), and to talk with others who are boldly bringing video gear where it has seldom gone before. Whether your idea of fun is tearing down a mountain on two wheels at 40 miles per hour, or simply paddling down a serene Southern river, you're sure to pick up some useful pointers.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING HIGH

By Scott Wasser

About 12 miles into what had started out as a gorgeous day, the skies suddenly filled with thick, dark clouds. So what? Many mountain bikers think the grimier and grungier it gets, the better. But while my body and bicycle were certainly up for the grime, my camcorder was not. The bright autumn sunshine we basked under while packing had given me a false sense of security—I didn't think about how I would protect the camcorder if it started to rain.

I now know better. When you're planning to videotape mountain biking, you need to prepare for the unexpected. But that's not as easy as it sounds. Taking everything you need may not be a problem with

**Freestyle Footage:** Darlene Kellner shoots skydiving video with a Sony CCD-TR101 camcorder, mounted on her helmet behind a 35mm Nikon.

some activities, but mountain bikers like to travel light.

Don't despair, though. You don't need much equipment or special skills to produce decent mountain biking video. Here's a few tips on how to make the most of your shoot.

- **Hardware:** Almost any 8mm or VHS-C unit is okay—the lighter and smaller, the better. Best is one that resists impact and moisture, like Hitachi's 8mm VM-SP1A. Image stabilization is also desirable—you'll be able to shoot stable video while riding, assuming the trail isn't too tough to tackle with just one hand on the bars.

- **Bag It:** That sudden rainstorm wouldn't have caught me off-guard if I had carried a plastic freezer bag. The bag will protect the camcorder from rain, mud and puddles when you're not taping and can even provide a fairly watertight enclosure for shooting in the rain. Just cut an opening large enough to poke your lens through and seal it around the camcorder with a heavy rubber band. If you position the bag's opening underneath your camcorder, you'll even be able to slip your hands inside and operate the controls.

- **You Can't Overpack:** When you're out on a mountain bike, chances are you're away from civilization and all the neat things it has to offer—like blank videotape and electrical outlets. So bring spare batteries and tape.

- **Carry On:** A pack on your back can be cumbersome, and a standard neck strap will turn your camcorder into a painful pendulum. So the trick setup for carrying video gear on the trails is the kind of vest many photographers wear. These vests are light and durable enough for aggressive riding, and their oversize pockets can accommodate tape, batteries and even smaller camcorders.

- **Shooting Tips:** Now that you're geared up, it's time to think about the shooting itself. Some of my favorite shots are from a stationary position, tapping friends as they ride into and out of the frame. Strong legs and good lungs (or patient friends who will wait until you ride far enough ahead to position yourself for the shot) are mandatory.

If you're a good rider, try shooting while you're on the move. Keep the lens zoomed out as far as possible to maxi-

mize depth of field and minimize camera shake. Never ride with the viewfinder to your eye. You won't be able to spot obstacles, and an unexpected jolt could do serious damage. Here, you'll want to use a neck strap in case you have to drop the camcorder and grab the handlebar.

Finally, many people relish mountain biking because it gets them out into nature, so take some time to get off the bike and shoot some of the scenery.

## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

By Scott Wasser

It's not that Darlene Kellner doesn't believe in the old adage about looking before you leap—it's more a case of her taking it one step further. Kellner, a skydiving instructor, videotapes while she leaps.

"Video is an excellent learning tool for the students," explains Kellner, chief instructor of the Northeast Pennsylvania Rippards, who jump from Hazleton Municipal Airport. "Skydiving is not an easy sport to learn because you only get, at most, a minute of practice time each jump. If your form is off just a little bit, it can cause a big problem. Plus, when you're up there scared to death, you aren't really aware of what may be causing your problem. But when you're sitting on the ground, looking at video of your jump, it's easy to see where you went wrong."

According to Kellner, skydiving is easy for the average person to learn. The activity is easy and inexpensive enough (\$150 to \$250 for a first jump) for some folks to do it just once for the so-called thrill of a lifetime. That's when Kellner uses her video equipment for a completely different purpose.

"I shoot a lot of first-time jumpers who want to make just one jump and want a record of it," she says. "First I'll



**Rolling Tape:** It's safest to shoot mountain-biking video when you're stopped, but if you're careful, you can get great footage while you're on the bike.

do an interview with them, and then I'll shoot during the takeoff. I'll shoot their faces, trying to capture their emotion. Then I'll shoot the freefall.

"I like to challenge myself by seeing if I can get them to react to me during the freefall. It's a good shot and it helps them relax. They open [their parachute]

**Reef Madness:**

In a scene from *The Caribbean Diving Show*, David Nadal videotapes a school of sharks.

pletely on what you're shooting — be aware of what's going on around you. Try shooting with the viewfinder just slightly away from your eye (a camcorder with a sports-type viewfinder works best here).

Proper footwear is essential. Sneakers simply don't provide the traction or support needed for climbing, and when you're shooting, your hands won't be free to help you balance yourself. Wear hiking boots if you plan to shoot from the ground or from a safe vantage point above a rock climb. If you intend to shoot from an anchored site on the rock, wear soft-soled rock climbing shoes.

Even in spectacular natural settings, your videos will get monotonous unless you vary the angles of your shots. The most obvious (and boring) shot is one taken of the climber from the ground up. A rule of thumb is to start from the bottom up, then search for other angles.

If it's possible to safely reach the end of the climber's route, do so. Anchor yourself (use climbing rope or slings made from nylon webbing if you're on a rock face), shoot from the top down, then capture the climber as he or she makes that last, exuberant effort to crest the ledge.

Another good vantage point is from the side. For hikers, that's easy. But when you're rock climbing, this requires planning and savvy. Rappel about half-

about a mile above the ground, but I freefall another half-mile so I can tape them as they come in for their landing."

Because she can't use her arms for shooting (remember, even a slight change in arm position will affect a skydiver's plunging body), Kellner must shoot hands-free. She starts the camcorder before she jumps. She first used a Sony GR-8 Video Watchman carried in her jumpsuit and connected to a miniature Sony video camera attached to her helmet. She feared the weight and bulk of even the smallest camcorder would dangerously affect her form.

Now, however, Kellner has become so proficient that she has a Sony CCD-TR101 Hi8 camcorder mounted on her helmet. She aims the camcorder with a Newton Ring Sight, an optical device originally developed as a bomb sight, which is attached to her helmet. Also mounted on her helmet is a still camera, which she triggers by chomping down on a remote switch carried in her mouth.

Kellner, who has over 5,000 jumps to her credit, has produced some remarkable film and tape. Her photograph of her husband Don making his 15,000th jump is in *The Guinness Book of World Records*. A TV program used tape she shot of a cerebral palsy victim skydiving. And while she didn't shoot the video of her own freefall wedding ceremony, Kellner did edit the tape, which was later shown on national television.

But Kellner doesn't videotape skydiving to attract attention or entertain her friends and family. "More important is the challenge of being able to do it,"

she says. "Videotaping skydiving is not easy. Your head has to be positioned just right, and you have to hold it perfectly still while traveling at speeds over 120 miles per hour." The ability to do that makes Kellner a pretty special skydiver. The ability to do that with a camcorder strapped to her head makes for some pretty special video.

### CLIMBING AND SHOOTING

By George Smith

Whether you're scaling the challenging walls of Yosemite Valley, climbing the twisty-turny routes of the Shawangunks in New York or just hiking the nearby foothills, you can shoot great videos if you just keep two things in mind: safety first, then camera angles.

Obviously, safety is much more of a concern for the serious rock climber. Action videos of rock climbs are best filmed by someone who is not climbing or belaying. Climbers need to focus all of their attention on scaling the rock, while belayers must concentrate on working the rope to check the climber in case there's a fall. That leaves shooting chores up to a third party.

In mountain environments, pebbles and even fist-size rocks commonly break free, and loose rocks are indifferent to whom they strike. Anyone staring into a camcorder viewfinder is especially at risk because they are more preoccupied with filming tasks than with the action around them. So try not to focus com-

**Seaworthy Stabilizer:** A monopod can help you shoot steady video from the deck of a boat.



SEAWORTHY: TY HARRINGTON

way down the side of the rock, or have an experienced belayer lower you down, and locate a secure anchor some distance from the subject's proposed route.

Avoid wide, panoramic views that show a liliputian climber spidering up a gigantic rock wall. Look instead for close-ups, which can add impact to your video. Focus on a climber's hands and fingers. Capture the struggle of trying to jam tired fingers into minute cracks. Look for fatigued legs quaking or a pair of climbing boots with barely a toehold on a meager little ledge. Another good subject for close-ups is the hardware used for climbing: chocks, pitons, carabiners, knots and slings.

If you're lucky, the end of a climb will be graced by a beautiful sunset. That's the time to zoom out for a wide-angle shot. Shoot into the setting sun without using your backlight compensator and you could end up with a beautiful silhouette of climbers framed by a majestic purple mountain range.

## DIVING FOR FOOTAGE

By Timothy Liebe

In 1986, David Nadal decided to combine two of his interests: scuba diving and producing public-access TV shows in New York City. The premiere episode of his original underwater show, *The Caribbean Diving Show*, included unplanned scenes of sharks swimming near the divers. "These sharks just appeared at this particular reef we went to," Nadal explains, "and we got some spectacular footage of them." Since then, he has also produced *East End Diving*, which is shot in the water off Montauk, Long Island.

"I grew up going down to the Bahamas in the winters," says Nadal, "and I've been scuba diving since I was 10 or 11. I started shooting my dives in Super 8 film around 1970, and graduated from Super 8 to 8mm video about 1985." These days, he uses Sony's Hi8 CCD-TR101 camcorder with an Ikelite housing that permits him to both focus and zoom — a vast improvement over his original "aim-and-shoot" underwater 8mm camcorder because, as he puts it, "Some critters underwater are kind of shy and don't like to come close to you."

Because of the nature of scuba diving, continued on page 56

## Adventure Accessories: Five To Go For Outdoor Video

Accessories can make or break any video shoot, but they're especially important outdoors, where the elements conspire against you and where the comforts of home are far away. Here are a few accessories we've often found necessary in the wild.

• **Zing Designs Video Camera Cover:** Zing's \$40 neoprene cover looks like a wetsuit for your camcorder. A semiperforated section up front helps sound get through to the mic, and a thinner neoprene section lets you operate the left-side controls. Opening a wetsuit-style zipper lets you tilt the viewfinder up. While the Zing cover won't save your camcorder if it falls in the water, it's effective protection against splashes and scrapes.

The cover works with Sony TR-series camcorders and other subcompacts with the viewfinder on the left side. A larger model fits Sony FX-series camcorders. But we found the stretchy cover adapts well to nearly any subcompact although the thin neoprene section often moves to a useless position. (Call Zing at 800-359-9119.)

• **Ziploc Bag:** Costing about 1/500th what the Zing cover costs, a large Ziploc bag does the same thing, although less gracefully. Put the camcorder into the bag top-first, cut a small hole for the lens and wrap a rubber band around the lens to hold the bag in place. Stick your hand into the bag to shoot.

• **Monopod:** You can use this highly portable steady device on a boat (see "Shooting Under Sail"), and you can easily carry it on a bike or in a backpack. You can also use it without extending the leg, grasping it near the head to get a Steadicam effect.

• **AA-cell adapter:** Power for a camcorder battery charger can be tough to come by in the boonies. The solution: an AA-cell adapter, which fits six AA cells into a casing that resembles the NP-type battery used on most Sony camcorders and their clones. AA-cell adapters are available from Ambico and Sony.

• **Neutral-density filter:** Outdoor light can overpower a camcorder's sensor, making it difficult to get the right exposure. This filter cuts down on the light entering the lens, increasing contrast and improving the look of video shot by daylight. It also protects your lens from scratches.

—Brent Butterworth



**S**o there we stood, Warren Christopher and me, shoulder to shoulder in the Oval Office awaiting orders while the Big Guy was on the phone to Yeltsin. The Secretary of State leaned an eighth of an inch closer to me and whispered, "Is that Grey Flannel you're wearing? It's intoxicating..."

The President hung up the phone and snorted at him. "It's Hai Karate, Warren—man, anybody'd know that." I smiled. 15-love. "Now listen up," the President continued, "I got a couple major assignments I need handled, and pronto. One's big, the other's a piece of cake. Mmmmm...cake...."

I said, "I'll take the big one, Mr. President." He grinned at me. "Good boy! Okay Warren, you get off easy this go-round—I want you to negotiate a peace plan between the Arabs and the Israelis." The Secretary let out a breath of relief. The President's easy smile disappeared as he turned to face me.

"And Corey—I want you to compare eight surround processors, and tell me if I really need one that's got THX or not!"

Everyone wants a mission. And for my sins, they gave me one.

#### THX—IS IT REALLY BETTER?

All quality surround processors use Dolby's Pro-Logic decoding to derive four channels—left, center, right and the mono surround channel—from Dolby Stereo-encoded soundtracks.

THX-approved surround processors—originally designed for use in THX systems, but now used with all types of home theater systems—add three extra circuits to Pro-Logic. Lucasfilm feels this improves the experience of movies played back in the home.

First, the left, center and right channels are "re-equalized" with a filter that reduces the highs above 7 kilohertz because Lucasfilm feels that film soundtracks mixed for proper tonal balance in a professional theater sound too bright when played in a home environment. Next, the mono surround channel audio is "timbre-matched"—another equalization stage that makes the surround channel sound more like the front chan-

nels. And finally, the surround channel is "decorrelated," a process which attempts to reduce localization of the mono surround channel by splitting it up into two channels and comb-filtering each one differently, to give the illusion of more spaciousness.

But do these circuits really improve the sound? Many home theater nuts believe they do not, and after evaluating these seven processors, I agree. While I've encountered a handful of bright-sounding laserdisks which benefitted from the treble filtering of THX's re-EQ circuit, the vast majority of the laserdisks I've heard sound overly dull and muffled when the THX re-EQ is engaged. I also find THX's timbre-matching of the surround speakers to be mostly ineffectual—yes, it changes the frequency response of the surround speakers, but it just makes them sound different, not matched to the three front speakers.

And as for the decorrelation of the surround speakers, I find this feature to be distracting rather than effective, as it adds a hollow, phasey "pseudo-stereo" quality to the surround channels. With all three THX-certified processors on hand for review, the system sounded much better and more like what I'm accustomed to in a good movie theater when the processor was set for straight Pro-Logic mode rather than THX.

However, this doesn't mean you shouldn't buy a THX decoder, because THX has become almost a standard feature in

high-end decoders. As it happens, the best- and worst-sounding decoders of this bunch are THX-certified. And you can always defeat the THX circuitry by switching to straight Pro-Logic mode.

#### LOS FAKE AMBIENCE MODES!-ODES!-ODES!

Aside from the Fosgate processors, all of the other units reviewed here also feature fake delay-generated "ambience" modes that have nothing to do with surround sound decoding, but merely add a bunch of delayed echoes to the sound to jazz it up. Labeled stadium, nightclub, concert hall, mosh pit, etc.,

## THX On Trial: Part 2

# THE DECODER DEBATE

*Do you really need a THX surround-sound decoder? Three THX and five non-THX models argue the point.*

none of these modes do anything for me except make me scratch my noggin as I try to imagine why manufacturers would mar their products with this kind of low-grade cheese.

In fact, when I asked one manufacturer's rep why the company included these modes, he sighed and admitted that he hated them, too, but that, "Some people like them — go figure." In any event, none of these "ambience" modes perform true surround-sound decoding, so my suggestion is to try them all out when you first hook up the processor, have a few cheap laughs, and then pretend the buttons aren't there for the rest of your natural life.

## WHY COMPARE SURROUND PROCESSORS?

You might think it's odd to compare eight surround processors that all perform exactly the same task. But there are several approaches to implementing Pro-Logic decoding, and each has a different audible signature. Most units, like the ADA, Adcom, AudioSource and Rotel processors reviewed here, use an analog IC chip to perform Pro-Logic decoding. Dolby itself doesn't make these chips, but rather licenses manufacturers like Sanyo and Analog Devices/PMI to design their own proprietary ICs to Dolby's specs. All four of the IC-based processors reviewed here use the Analog Devices/PMI SSM 2120-series chip, widely regarded as the best-sounding of the various Pro-Logic ICs available.

Fosgate stands alone among surround processor manufacturers by performing Pro-Logic decoding with a discrete circuit, which the company claims sounds better than an IC chip.

The third method used for Pro-Logic decoding involves DSP, or digital signal processing. In this type of processor, the stereo audio signal is first digitized with A/D chips (analog-to-digital convertors) so that the surround decoding is performed exclusively in the digital domain. The four channels of surround audio are then converted back to analog with D/A chips (digital-to-analog convertors) just like in CD players and DAT machines.

But just like other digital audio gear, the sound quality of DSP-based surround processors rests heavily with the quality of their A/D and D/A chips and associated analog stages. Unfortunately, high-quality A/D and D/A chips are very expensive, the result being that nearly all DSP-based processors feature rather low-grade digital chips that measure poorly and sound likewise. Worst of all for home theater applications, these low-grade digital chips have their greatest distortion at the lower levels where much of a soundtrack's ambi-

ence and dialog reside. It's worth noting that just the separate A/D processors used by the recording industry to master CDs cost more by themselves than even the most expensive DSP-based surround processor on the market.

## THE CONTENDERS

I assembled eight surround processors for the listening tests — four affordable units, two kilobuck jobs, and two all-out He-Man boxes. They were: ADA's \$3,000 SSD-66THX, Adcom's \$1,000 GTP-600, Audio Source's \$399 SS-Three-II, Carver's \$600 CT-27v, Fosgate's \$2,799 Model Three-A and \$600

ioneer CLD-95 laserdisc player with a Theta Prime II D/A convertor and an Audio Alchemy DTI digital interface. I connected the components with Kimber audio cables and Canare video and digital audio cables. And here's how the processors sounded....

• **AudioSource SS-Three-II:** We'll start with the AudioSource because while it's the cheapest processor of the group, it's by no means the worst sounding. The budget SS-3-II features the good-sounding Analog Devices decoder IC and a stereo 30-watt amplifier for center and surround channels. A full-featured remote is included. Lacking any



**Decoder Differences:** Fosgate designed the Model Five (top) to plug into a preamp tape loop, while Carver's CT-27v and Adcom's GTP-600 serve as A/V control centers, with video switching and AM/FM tuners.

Model Five, Kenwood's \$1,000 KC-X1, and Rotel's \$600 RSP-960AX. Three of the processors — the ADA, the Fosgate 3A and the Kenwood — are THX-approved.

I connected each processor into my home theater reference system, which is anchored by an all-NHT speaker system — three of their terrific-sounding SuperZero speakers for left, center and right, and a pair each of NHT's SW2P powered subwoofers and HDP-1 dipole surrounds. I used two Acurus 200X3 three-channel, 200-watt amps and a Pi-

video source switching and multiple audio inputs, the AudioSource is best suited for use with an existing preamplifier rather than as a stand-alone system controller like the Adcom, Rotel and Carver units.

More than any other processor in the group, the AudioSource defines the term "entry-level" — while its sound quality is quite a bit rougher than the best processors, the SS-3-II represents a true upgrade from the sound of an all-in-one surround sound receiver, most of which sound far more canned and grainy



**Brothers, But Not Twins:** Kenwood's KC-X1 (top) and Fosgate's Model Three-A (above) are both THX-certified, but the Kenwood costs much less and offers a considerably lower degree of sound quality.

in the highs. The AudioSource's sound quality can be described as "mid-fi"—not nearly as dirty and coarse as a cheap surround receiver, but not as open- or clean-sounding as the Big Boys. I can recommend the SS-3-II as the cheapest decent-sounding surround processor on the market, but you can get much better sound quality for just \$200 more with either the Rotel RSP-960AX or especially the Fosgate Model Five.

• **Adcom GTP-600:** Adcom calls the GTP-600 a "surround-sound tuner/pre-amplifier"—in addition to surround-sound functions, the unit features a quartz-synthesized AM/FM tuner and enough audio and video inputs to handle a full A/V system with a CD player, two tape decks, and up to four video sources including S-video types. On-screen display of system settings is included, along with a full-featured learning remote. A less-expensive version, the \$800 GTP-550, omits the S-video inputs and onscreen display, and substitutes a non-learning remote. Both versions feature the Analog Devices/PMI decoder IC.

Sonically, the GTP-600 is a full step up from the AudioSource, sounding much cleaner in the midrange and highs as well as possessing tighter and more powerful bass. Voices had a trace of

hardness and grit compared with the \$400-less Fosgate Model Five—although I thought the GTP-600's sound was good, it was bettered by the Fosgate and essentially matched by the Rotel processor, which is also \$400 less. The Adcom does have several features the other two lack—tone controls, loads of inputs, a good AM/FM tuner, and a headphone jack that allows for late-night viewing without disturbing your sweet thing. I think the stripped-down \$800 version is a better value.

• **Rotel RSP-960AX:** Much less feature-laden than the Adcom, the Rotel is more like an upmarket version of the AudioSource. It has an integral switcher and a remote control, so it can serve as the control center of a system, but with only two stereo audio inputs and three S-video/video/stereo audio inputs, it won't serve you well if you have a lot of source components.

Like the Adcom, the RSP-960AX offers much better sound than the AudioSource. The Rotel actually sounds quite similar to the Adcom, making it the better buy if you don't need the Adcom's many features. The identically-priced Fosgate Model Five beats both when it comes to sonics, but with its multiple inputs and switching capability, the RSP-960AX is much better suited

for use as a preamp in an all-purpose audio/video system.

• **Fosgate Model Five:** The littlest Fosgate has few features, a single audio input, no video inputs and is really meant to be used in a tape-loop of your existing audio preamp. The Five's knobless front panel lacks a volume control, although if you don't have a preamp to use with the Five, its remote lets you control the volume, so you could use it with a switcher only, no preamp. The Five features the same discrete surround decoder circuit as the more expensive Fosgate processors, although it lacks the Model Three-A's THX mode.

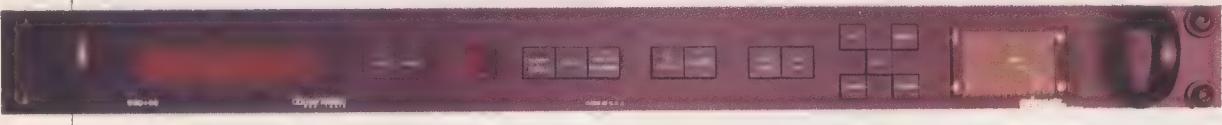
The Fosgate may lack the features of the Adcom, Rotel and Carver processors, but it more than makes up for it in sound quality. This is the best-sounding processor of the \$1,000-and-under group, and by a large margin. The Five has such a clean, grit-free audiophile-grade sound, I had to go back and re-evaluate the Adcom and Rotel processors. I still liked them—but the Fosgate sounded better.

The Five also features a proprietary surround mode called 70mm, which sends a bit of the left- and right-channel signals back to their respective surround channels. I found this mode dramatic and interesting when the program material had little or no surround information of its own, giving the sound a cool "wraparound" effect.

The Five's single audio input and lack of video inputs really mandate its use with a separate preamp—you can't use it as a stand-alone control center like the Adcom, Rotel or Carver processors. But if you've already got a good preamp, the \$600 Fosgate Model Five offers the sound quality of units costing several thousand dollars—a best buy!

• **Carver CT-27v:** Like the Adcom GTP-600, the Carver is a full-featured surround processor/preamp/AM-FM tuner with tone controls, S-video inputs, multiple DSP "ambience" modes, a phono stage, a headphone jack, a full-featured remote, even a "Vocal Zoom" knob to boost the center channel. The CT-27v seems to have all the bases covered but, unfortunately, it lagged behind the AudioSource, Adcom, Rotel and Fosgate processors sonically.

Dialog sounded coarse, with an electronic edge. The CT-27v also exhibited quite poor low-level resolution—some of the surround ambience I heard with the better processors in the group was



**High-End Heaven:** ADA's SSD-66THX decoder.

lost. Whether this is solely due to the CT-27v's use of an inexpensive DSP-based surround decoder circuit or not I can't say, but it is interesting that the two processors which brought up the rear in this group were the only two with DSP-based decoding.

DSP has the potential for good sound, but not with such inexpensive implementation. Had it sounded better, the feature-laden, \$600 CT-27v would be a good value considering it also sports an AM/FM tuner and a full-featured preamp.

• **Kenwood KC-X1:** Much hoopla has greeted the KC-X1's introduction, as it is the first THX-approved surround processor to be offered at an affordable price. The DSP-based KC-X1 "Digital A/V Control Amplifier/Tuner" performs all surround processing in the digital domain, and features an AM-FM tuner plus so many other features that the full-featured learning remote has 72 buttons.

The KC-X1's THX approval means that the KC-X1 was evaluated by Lucasfilm's THX engineers for both electrical performance and sound quality, and given the collective thumbs-up that allows the KC-X1 to display the THX logo on its front panel. But I can't believe anyone *really* listened to this processor, because it was far and away the worst I have ever heard.

The KC-X1 added distortion and metallic-sounding grunge to dialog, making it a chore to sit through an entire scene, much less a whole movie. Low-level detail like surround ambience and effects cues sounded blurred and shredded, like metal being ground into shavings. Whether in THX or straight Dolby Pro-Logic mode, I found listening to the KC-X1 unpleasant and fatiguing.

Listening to a second sample of the KC-X1 confirmed my impressions. (See the sidebar "THX—A Question of Specs" for further comments from Lucasfilm and other *Video Magazine* editors.)

• **ADA SSD-66THX:** An all-out design based around the Analog Devices/PMI decoder chip, the ADA is a purist audiophile processor whose primary focus is the best possible sound quality. Like many products designed for sound quality above all else, the ADA's cosmetics were clearly the worst of the group, although the full-featured remote and front-panel controls allowed for relatively easy calibration and operation. The ADA is meant to be used with a switcher or in an existing preamp's tape loop rather than as a stand-alone system controller. The SSD-66THX is THX-certified.

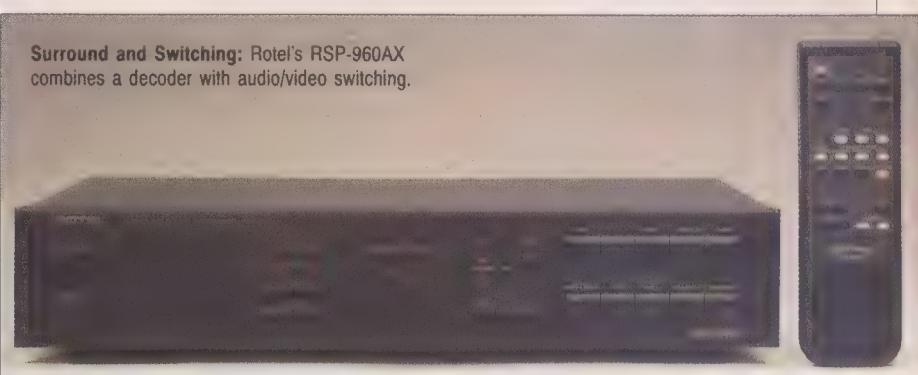
The ADA processor came up right after the Kenwood unit, and I'll tell you, it was like waking up from a nightmare

natural-sounding processor of the group—it's sound quality reminded me of expensive high-end gear. There was a total lack of the grittiness and roughness I heard to some degree from all the other processors except for the Fosgate Three-A, and low-level details were much easier to hear as a result.

Dialog, too, was extremely clean and clear, and the entire presentation had such an ease and relaxed quality about it that I soon forgot I was supposed to be doing a critical evaluation, and just settled back to enjoy the movie! A higher compliment I can't pay to a surround processor, and the ADA fully deserves it. Along with the Fosgate Three-A, the ADA SSD-66THX offered the best sound quality of the group and gets a serious thumbs-up.

• **Fosgate Model Three-A:** The flagship of the Fosgate line of surround processors, the THX-certified Three-A features Fosgate's proprietary discrete

**Surround and Switching:** Rotel's RSP-960AX combines a decoder with audio/video switching.



to find myself surrounded by the Swedish Bikini Team. The ADA's sound quality is state-of-the-art, and fully justifies its hefty price tag.

The ADA was the smoothest, most

surround decoder technology. Although it's called "digital servo logic," Fosgate's surround audio circuit is all-analog—the "digital" in the title refers to the logic—*continued on page 108*

## THX: A Question Of Specs

The Kenwood KC-X1's poor performance left us with many questions about it and Lucasfilm's Home THX program. To answer them, our editors gave two samples of the KC-X1 a good, hard listen, then asked Lucasfilm to test one of the samples.

The seven *Video Magazine* staffers who auditioned the KC-X1 found its performance indeed problematic. In Pro-Logic mode, the KC-X1 sounded veiled, with less sonic detail than the \$1,000 Fosgate Model Four we compared it to. Worse, voices sounded harsh and metallic.

We also felt its THX mode produced some unacceptable artifacts—on many of the discs we tried, the re-equalization rolled off the high frequencies more than we would have liked, muffling voices and diminishing ambience. And on the *Dick Tracy* laserdisc, the decorrelation circuit literally threw Mandy Patinkin's piano out of tune—it sounded more like a dusty old upright than a grand piano. We haven't noticed these problems to as great a degree with other THX decoders we've tried.

Lucasfilm's testing confirmed some of our results. It found that depending on the channels, the region around -30 dB relative to Dolby level showed distortion above the THX spec. The company says the THX circuitry was working fine, though, and that situations in which the pitch-changing of the KC-X1's decorrelation circuitry might cause the effect we noticed are rare. Lucasfilm suggested a different way of calibrating our system that reduced the relative level of the surround channels and did diminish the detuning effect—but as you would expect, it also cut down on the surround sound effect.

Lucasfilm also says that with properly mastered laser-discs, the re-equalization circuit should work perfectly, although it might be too dull (or even too bright) in certain rooms. Our experience is that a great many laserdiscs are not mastered to the same standards Lucasfilm dictates for THX-approved discs.

—Brent Butterworth

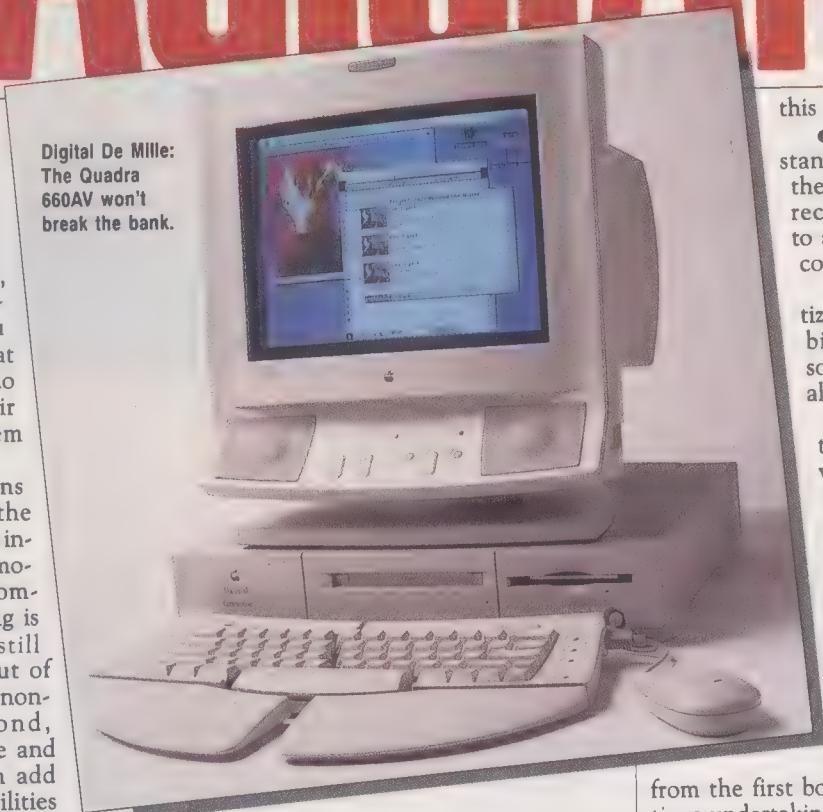
# MULTIMEDIA MAGICIANS

Everyone knows that a personal computer can be the videomaker's best friend. Any tool that gives you one-stop convenience for storyboarding, scripting, post-production and titling is something you definitely want to have at your disposal. So why do so few people use their computers to help them make video?

Two primary reasons come to mind. First, the technology is still in its infancy. Full-frame, full-motion video with random-access hard-disk editing is possible on PC, but still very expensive and out of the question for most non-professionals. Second, though many hardware and software products can add video and audio capabilities to a home computer, compatibility issues can cause many problems.

However, all that is changing. Now celebrating the 10th anniversary of its revolutionary Macintosh, Apple Computer has struck a blow (again) for simplicity and standards in the PC world. Two recent Macs, the Quadra 660AV and the Quadra 840AV, come with full multimedia production capabilities built right into the box, the first consumer-oriented computers to do so. What does

Digital De Mille:  
The Quadra  
660AV won't  
break the bank.



*Apple's AV Macs blend video, sound and graphics on an all-digital desktop*

this mean? How about:

- The ability to play standard NTSC video on the computer monitor or record computer output to a VCR without a scan converter.

- The ability to digitize, edit and mix full 16-bit, CD-quality stereo sound without additional hardware.

- The ability to capture moving or still video in the same way and store it on the computer's hard drive.

In other words, the AV Macs eliminate the hassle and expense of installing add-on audio and video cards, offering instead a simple one-box solution that's multimedia friendly

from the first boot-up. Quite an ambitious undertaking.

## UNDER THE HOOD

The AV Macs are based around familiar Macintosh architecture with the important addition of a digital signal processing (DSP) chip from AT&T. This chip is responsible not only for the 16-bit stereo sound capability, but for accelerated graphics performance. Jacks in back of the computer handle all the inputs and outputs for audio and video. Both composite and S-video jacks are pro-

vided for video input/output. Audio is handled by stereo 1/8-inch minijacks, similar to the jacks on a Walkman—not exactly a professional-caliber interface, but it gets the job done.

Because of their internal sound processing ability, the AV Macs can also respond to spoken commands. A small microphone is included for this purpose, although controlling the computer by talking to it ("Computer, start my word processor") is a novelty that wears thin pretty quickly. As noted before, sound quality is the same 44.1 kilohertz sampling rate as CD (the higher 48 kHz sampling rate used for DAT is also supported). One of the AV Macs with an internal CD-ROM drive can also be used as a stereo playback system, although the internal speakers are nothing special.

The Quadra 660AV works off a Motorola 68040 processor running at 25 megahertz. For those more familiar with the PC platform, that roughly translates into the speed of a low-end 486 Windows-type machine. The 840AV uses the same processor, but ups the clock speed to 40 MHz for an appreciable increase in performance. The 660 features a low-profile cabinet about two inches high, but with a relatively large footprint—you'll need a good amount of desk space for this unit.

The 840 is a vertical mini-tower, which takes up less desk space, but is too small to place a monitor on top of. The 660 comes with only one expansion slot for extra cards (like accelerators or video compression boards), while the more versatile 840 features three extra slots. Both these machines are plug 'n' play—attach the keyboard, monitor and mouse, and you're ready to roll. Street prices for a complete 660 hardware system begin at around \$2,500; the 840 will set you back at least \$3,500.

#### WHAT CAN IT (NOT) DO?

After plugging in the 660AV, I decided to jump right in and author a multimedia project I had proposed to a client. The presentation, which would eventually be distributed on a VHS tape, consisted of an introduction shot



**Big Mac:** The Quadra 840AV has a speedy processor and three expansion slots.

on a camcorder, several 3-D graphics, a series of video clips, a montage of still pictures and audio taken from radio interviews, and some simple text, graphics and narration for an outro. While all this seemed easy enough, no computer I had ever used could do quality work on all these jobs without expensive add-ons. The prospect of being able to simply plug the audio and video sources into a stock computer and start working was enticing to say the least. Several software programs were assembled for the job: Adobe Premiere 3.0 for video processing, Passport Producer Pro for multimedia assembly, Deck II by OSC for audio editing, Fusion Recorder by Video Fusion for audio/video capture and Abbate Video's venerable Video Toolkit to make the final edit.

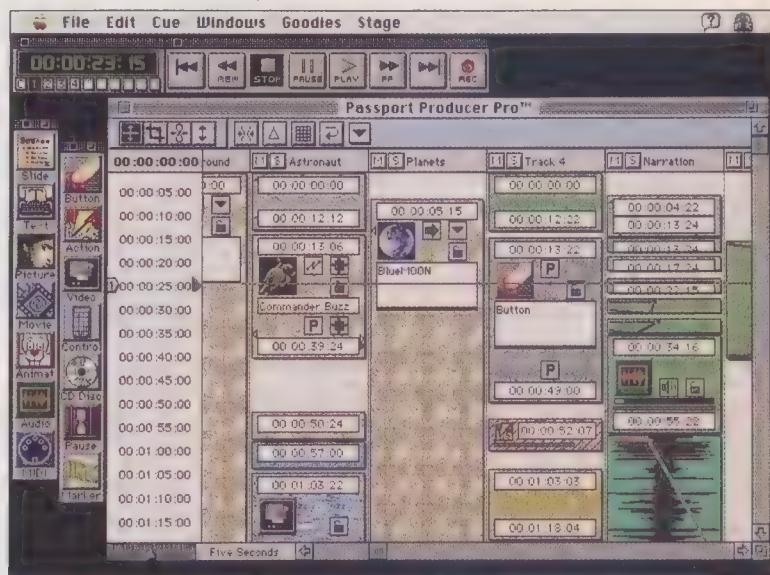
Step one was to record the video introduction, digitize it and edit it on the computer. The camcorder footage was poured into the Mac via Fusion Recorder, a simple application program that puts a record window on

screen and captures video, audio or both. Here was the first (and only real) disappointment of the project. Even with the internal video digitizer, the

660AV just isn't powerful enough to do serious video capture. At a window size of 320 x 240 pixels (half-screen size), I was unable to get acceptable motion—about 10 frames per second seemed the limit. Obviously, this isn't nearly good enough for even non-broadcast applications. At the more common QuickTime window size of 160 x 120 pixels, I was able to get a decent performance level of about 15 to 20 frames per second, which in most cases is surprisingly effective.

However, my plan to make nondescript video (the camcorder footage) look like zowie multimedia (through QuickTime) was unsuccessful. Instead, I chose to use the introduction footage as it was. There are external video compression boards—such as those from Radius, SuperMac and RasterOps—that can plug into the AV Macs for more effective video capture. None is as inexpensive or convenient as the capture built into the 660 and 840, but all will at

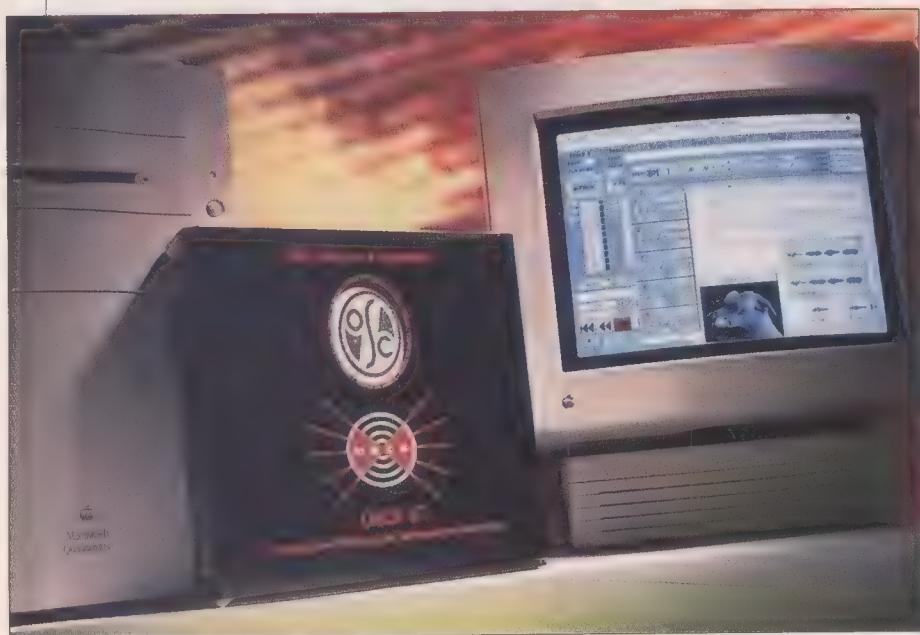
**No Visa Required:** Software programs like Passport Producer Pro assemble the elements of multimedia.



least give you real-world video, as opposed to a tiny QuickTime window.

Next, I had to record the narration, which would later be synchronized to

# MULTIMEDIA



Studio City: With Deck II software, you can turn your Mac into a four-track recorder.

the 3-D graphics. *Fusion Recorder* proved a very simple and effective solution, and even with the 660's inexpensive stock microphone, I was able to get good quality results. Recording at 16-bit quality was very pleasant indeed, though this process demands plenty of storage capability — each minute of CD-quality stereo takes up about 10 megabytes on the hard disk.

Fortunately, the longest audio file I had to assemble for this project was about four minutes long. Once the narration was recorded, I decided to fix a few pauses and one flubbed line. I imported the audio into *Premiere* and went to work. While *Premiere* is probably the most powerful consumer-level software for editing and processing video on the Mac, its audio editing features aren't nearly as sophisticated. Mostly there are provisions for cut and paste; fancy tools like crossfades and EQ are beyond its scope.

While I was able to make the simple edits I needed using *Premiere*, I wish I could have used *Deck II*, which unfortunately arrived just after I finished the project. This astounding software turns either the 660 or the 840 into a four-track digital recording studio without any additional hardware. The tools for digital audio on the Mac are far more mature than they are for video, and it shows with programs like *Deck II*. If you've got one of the AV machines, you

could add *Deck II* for \$399 and a big hard drive (600 MB would give you an hour's time, enough for a full CD) for about \$600.

This means you'd have a fully professional digital setup with which you could record and mix a real compact disc — for about \$1,000! Now that's what I call progress. Even though I had already edited the radio clips using *Premiere*, I went back and did it again using *Deck II*, just for the fun of it. Suffice it to say that this software is reason enough to consider purchasing an AV Macintosh. For other Mac users, *Deck II* will also work with Digidesign's AudioMedia card, which is the professional standard for digital audio on this platform.

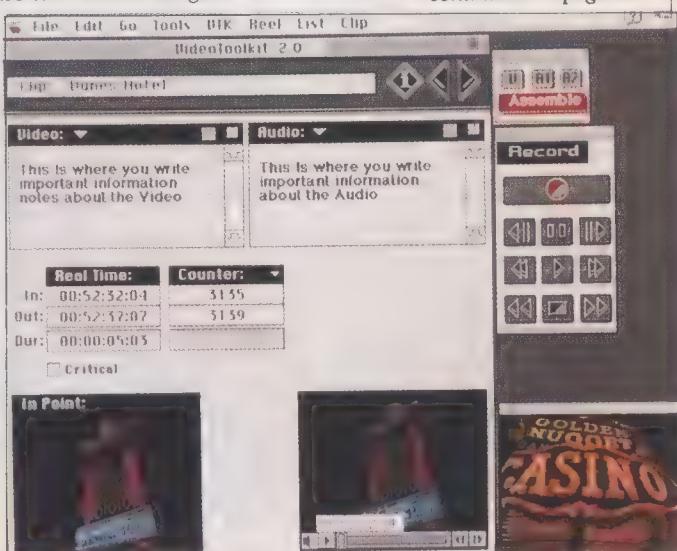
## LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Once all the audio was edited, I had to lay out the pictures and graphics to illustrate it. The plan was to have the

3-D charts wipe from one to the other, following the narration. Other audio clips would feature a series of still photos that would follow in much the same way. I could have used a scanner to capture the still pictures, but the 660 gave me another neat option — grab stills from camcorder footage that had already been shot. The AV machines include a simple application called *Video Monitor* that shows full-motion video on the computer screen. When you like what you see, simply hit the standard Mac "copy" command and bang — you've captured a still. The process worked like a charm, as each still was saved as an easily imported PICT file. Within minutes and with no hassle, I had more than enough good quality shots to illustrate the audio. Wow.

Putting everything together required a multimedia sequencer, which could assemble the picture, sounds and graphics. Although I usually use *Macromedia Director* for such jobs, I decided to try out *Producer Pro*, which like *Deck II*, just blew me away. Simple yet extremely flexible, *Producer Pro* presents you with a multitrack "time-line" on which you lay out your various multimedia elements. The program lets you work with a variety of graphic file formats: 16-bit audio (*Director* is limited to 8-bit capability), animations, MIDI files (if you've got ■

continued on page 58



Editor-In-Chief: Abbate's *VideoToolkit* controls two VCRs for logging and editing.

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- How to use miniatures to add realism to your videos.

- Imaginative effects you can achieve with filters, lenses, and homemade masks.

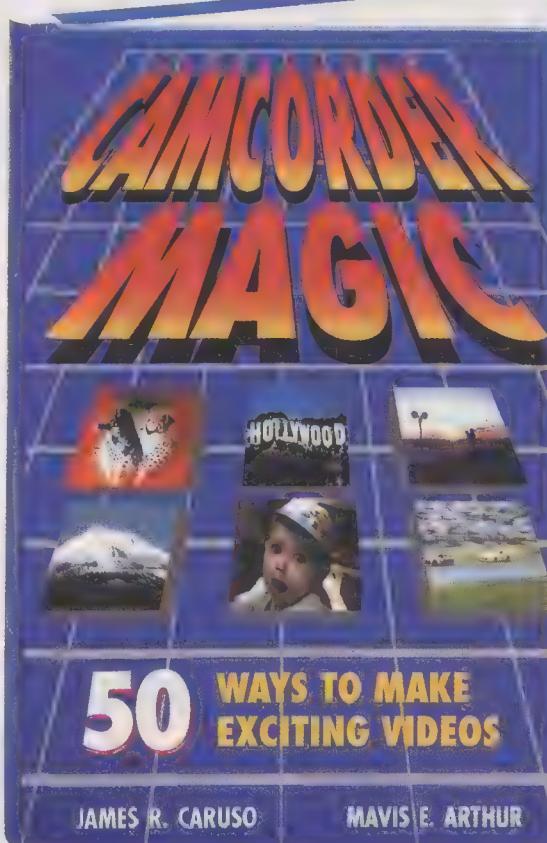
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VM 5/4

# VHS CAMCORDER BUYING GUIDE

Remember your first encounter with a portable VHS video rig? If it was back at the beginning, around 1979, it probably involved a seven-pound, no-frills video camera tied by a thick umbilical cord to a 22-pound VHS recorder. Of course, your pack would have also carried a couple of extra batteries: foot-long lead weights good for only 15 minutes each. By 1985, the beast had been tamed, integrated into unit-body camcorders. "Our VM 2000 weighed around 9-1/2 pounds," recalls Sharp camcorder marketing manager Bob Scaglione.

Today's VHS camcorders are still relative heavyweights, besieged by smaller and lighter 8mm and VHS-C compacts. Yet, to the surprise of many, VHS camcorders have not gone the way of all flesh. Shrewdly redesigned, they still remain popular, although they no longer dominate camcorder sales. As a group, their strengths are simplicity, affordability and sturdy, comfortable ease of use. But individual units, including a handful of S-VHS models, still offer the sophistication serious videographers require.

To keep pace with technology and consumers' tastes, VHS camcorders "underwent a major reconditioning in weight and strength," says Peter Schindo, Panasonic's VHS product training manager. "Our lenses were downsized, while some chunks of the aluminum die-cast chassis were replaced with lighter metals or plastic." At the same time, "hundreds of parts were replaced by a handful of microprocessors," adds Gregg Chason, video marketing manager for Philips Consumer Electronics. Other parts were miniaturized while new printed circuit boards gave SlimFast profiles to former full-bodies.

To help shrink VHS tape

transports, Panasonic and Quasar borrowed the design of a smaller 41-millimeter head drum from their VHS-C lines.

Ironically, the larger diameter head is now present in Panasonic's VHS-C camcorders, where the company says it provides extra tape stability in jarring environments. "If we retooled the VHS chassis, we'd probably go to a 62mm size," acknowledges Schindo. Other VHS camcorder makers—like

Hitachi, Sharp, Goldstar and Samsung—have stayed with 62mm head drums.

While no VHS camcorder will ever slip into your coat pocket, today's lightest models are amazing pieces of work. Units like Sharp's VL-L63U, which weighs just over three pounds, are easily grasped in one hand. Most other current VHS models hover near the four- and five-pound marks, complete with battery and, at three to four inches wide, are narrow enough to slip inside an attache case or next to your baby in a stroller.

And, by golly, a mainstream audience continues its love affair with these bigger galoots. Twenty-five percent of camcorder buyers invested in full-size models last year, reports the Electronic Industries Association. A similar share is expected this year. On TV marketplaces like the QVC and Home Shopping Networks, heartland buyers vote "fifty-fifty between full-size VHS and our high-tech, more expensive 8mm View-Cams," says Sharp's Scaglione.

What's the attraction? Obviously, friendly prices help to preserve VHS



**Switch Hitter:** Panasonic's PV900, with a side-swapping viewfinder, works for righties and lefties.

# BUYING GUIDE

• BRAND	• MODEL	• PRICE	• WEIGHT (LBS.)	• ZOOM/DIGITAL ZOOM	• COLOR VIEWFINDER (PIXELS)	• TOP SHUTTER SPEED	• STABILIZER	• LIGHT (WATTS)	• REMOTE CONTROL	• SPECIAL FEATURES
<b>VHS CAMCORDERS</b>										
GE	CG686	NA	5.3	8x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AP, AVF, BG, D/T, ES, FR, HS, LTC, QR, TTR, 2HR
GE	CG704	NA	5.3	12x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AP, AVF, BG, D/T, ES, FR, HS, LTC, QR, TTR, 2HR
GOLDSTAR	GVC-C425	\$800	4.7	8x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AVD, AR, AVI, BG, DF, D/T, E, LTC, ST, T, TTR, VISS, VSZ
HITACHI	VM-1600	\$799	4.6	12x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AEM, AVD, AVI, D/T, DTR, HS, ST, SY, T, TL, VISS, WB
HITACHI	VM-2600	\$899	4.6	12x/24x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AEM, AVD, AVI, D/T, DTR, HS, ST, SY, T, TL, VISS, WB, 2HR
HITACHI	VM-1700	\$699	4.5	12x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AEM, AR, BG, D/T, FR, T, TTR, 2SZ, VISS
HITACHI	VM-2700	\$799	4.5	12x	N	1/4,000	N	Y(4w)	N	AR, BG, D/T, FR, T, TTR, 2SZ, WBA
HITACHI	VM-3700	\$899	4.5	12x	Y(100k)	1/4,000	N	Y(4w)	N	AR, BG, DF, D/T, FR, IZ, T, TTR, 2HR, 2SZ, WBA
MAGNAVOX	CVS315AV	\$599	4.6	8x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AVF, BG, D/T, FR, LTC, QR, SE, TTR
MAGNAVOX	CVS325AV	\$699	4.6	12x	N	1/10,000	N	Opt(6w)	N	AVD, BG, D/T, FR, LTC, QR, SE, ST, TTR, T, WBS
PANASONIC	PV-900	\$799	4.2	12x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AP, BG, BM, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, SH, TTR, WB, HS
PANASONIC	PV-910A	\$899	4.3	12x	Y(96.6k)	1/10,000	N	Y(10w)	N	AP, BG, BM, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, SH, TTR, WB, HS
PANASONIC	PV-760A	\$1,299	4.4	12x/30x	N	1/10,000	Y	Y(10w)	Opt	AP, BG, BM, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, SH, TTR, WB, AVD, DF, DSS, SY, ST, TL, VISS
PANASONIC BROADCAST	AG-186	\$1,085	4.2	12x	N	1/10,000	N	Y(10w)	N	AD, AVD, AVI, AVF, BG, BM, CC, D/T, DTR, FR, HS, LC, ST, TL, VD, VISS
PANASONIC BROADCAST	AG-195U	\$1,500	5.7	8x	N	1/8,000	N	N	Opt	AD, AE, AVD, AR, AVF, BG, CC, DSS, D/T, DTR, FR, IE, LTC, LC, E, ST, TL, 2SZ
QUASAR	VM745	NA	4.2	12x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AP, BG, BM, CC, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, RV, SH, TTR, 2HR, 2SZ, WB
QUASAR	VM749	NA	4.3	12x	Y(96.6k)	1/10,000	N	N	N	AP, BG, BM, CC, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, RV, SH, TTR, 2HR, 2SZ, WB
RCA	CC413	NA	4.4	12x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AP, D/T, ES, FR, LTC, QR, T, TTR, VISS, 2SZ
RCA	CC547	NA	4.4	12x/24x	Y(100k)	1/4,000	N	Y(4w)	N	AP, AVD, AVI, DF, D/T, ES, FR, IZ, LB, LTC, QR, T, TTR, 2SZ, VISS, WBA
SAMSUNG	SCF703	\$800	5.5	8x	N	1/4,000	N	N	N	AVI, AVF, D/T, ES, LTC, QR, TTR, 2HR
SHARP	VL-L390U	\$900	3.4	12x	N	1/10,000	N	N	N	AVD, AVI, AVF, BG, D/T, FR, IE, 2HR, VISS, VSZ
SHARP	VL-L63U	\$1,000	3.4	12x	N	1/10,000	N	N	Y	AVD, AVI, AVF, BG, D/T, FR, IE, 2HR, VISS, VSZ
<b>S-VHS CAMCORDERS</b>										
PANASONIC	PV-S770	\$1,599	4.4	12x/30x	N	1/10,000	Y	Y(10w)	Opt	AP, BG, BM, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, SH, TTR, WB, AVD, DF, DSS, SY, ST, TL, VISS
PANASONIC BROADCAST	AG-455U	\$2,450	5.9	12x	N	1/8,000	N	N	N	AD, AEM, AVD, AR, AVF, BG, CC, DSS, D/T, DTR, FR, IE, LTC, LC, SE, ST, TL, 2SZ
PANASONIC BROADCAST	AG-460	\$3,850	8.1	10x	N	1/1,000	N	N	N	AD, AEM, AVD, AVI, AR, AVF, BG, CC, D/T, DTR, ES, FR, HS, IE, LTC, LC, QR, SE, T (opt), 2CCD, 2SZ, VISS

## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

**Y:** yes, feature present; **N:** no, feature absent; **NA:** not available; **Opt:** optional. **SPECIAL FEATURES.** **AP:** auto playback; **AD:** audio dub; **AEM:** auto-exposure modes; **AVD:** audio and video dub; **AVI:** audio/video input; **AR:** auto rewind; **AVF:** audio/video fade; **BG:** battery gauge; **BM:** bookmark search; **CC:** camera case supplied; **DF:** digital fades (3-way); **DSS:** digital still strobe; **D/T:** date/time stamp; **DTR:** digital tracking; **ES:** edit search; **FR:** full-range autofocus (macro to infinity); **HS:** hot shoe; **IE:** insert edit; **IZ:** instant zoom; **LTC:** lapsed-time counter; **LB:** letterbox movie mode; **LC:** lens cap built-in; **QR:** quick review; **RV:** reversible viewfinder; **SE:** smart edit (search) control; **SH:** switch hitter handle; **ST:** self-timer; **SY:** synchro-edit; **T:** titler; **TL:** time-lapse; **TTR:** tape time remaining indicator; **VD:** video dub; **VISS:** auto tape indexing for Video Index Search System; **WB:** wind buffer switch; **WBA:** wind buffer, automatic; **2CCD:** 2-CCD image sensor; **2HR:** 2-hour battery; **2SZ:** 2-speed zoom lens; **VSZ:** variable-speed zoom lens

## CAMCORDER GUIDE



Budget Buddy: Magnavox's CVR325 has a fast shutter and a \$699 price.

selling power. List prices begin at \$599 for Magnavox's CLS315AV, and consumers with an eye for special sales and close-outs may even do better. The larger VHS bodies ease design tasks, helping manufacturers hold down cost, and VHS shooters seem less interested in bells and whistles than their minicam counterparts, which also helps to hold down prices. VHS buyers are thought of as "people looking for the ease of use and simplicity that a full-size gives," says Philips' Chason. "They're more comfortable with the fact that they can just take the tape out of the camcorder and pop it into their VCRs."

But full-bodies remain popular for other reasons as well. VHS camcorders rest more securely on a shoulder, so they work (and look) more like the professional models used by TV news shooters. Employing your own body as a monopod also diminishes the need for the electronic image stabilization so popular on compacts. In fact, so far this year, that expensive extra is found on just two full-size VHS models, Panasonic's PV-706A and PV-S770.

Big-mitt types find the bigger camcorders more comfortable to use, and have less trouble finding and pressing appropriate buttons. Indeed, buttons on VHS models are "50 to 200 percent larger than the buttons on compacts," notes Scaglione, "and all are clearly in sight on the bigger body."

In a pinch, or on the road, VHS camcorders can function as a playback machine for home videos and pre-recorded tapes. Some models—including those from RCA, GE and Panasonic—have an auto playback

function that kicks in when you insert a pre-recorded tape with the tab punched out. But on the whole, "fewer people use these camcorders for playback than you might expect. They'll usually just pop the tape into their home VCRs," notes Schindler, explaining why so few come with remote controls. Panasonic, for example, only in-

cludes a remote with two models, and it's only a wired pause/start control. While no manufacturer wants to typecast VHS camcorder customers as less techno-savvy than others, they clearly do so by their approach toward features. The most critical feature concept, embodied now in every VHS video shooter above \$700, is full automatic operation. The iris, shutter, white balance and focusing are all governed by digital microprocessors in an interactive and intuitive fashion that's sometimes referred to as artificial intelligence or fuzzy logic. While the circuitry can be manually over-ridden, VHS camcorder designs suggest there's no need to bother. The camcorders pick combinations of shutter speed and iris (or aperture) openings designed to yield not only well-exposed pictures, but long depths-of-field.

When moving from bright sunlight to shaded area, "neuro" auto-exposure light detectors compensate like the human eye for the dramatic change, and much more quickly and accurately than camcorders could respond just a few years ago. Similarly, when shooting inside, under a mix of natural and artificial light, the smart circuitry in most VHS

camcorders instantly determines the best white balance, so faces don't appear either rosy red or icy blue. As a consequence of all this automation, shooting good-looking videos becomes child's play, a snap even for the multitudes who resist reading operation manuals.

Ease of use is also celebrated by manufacturers with features particular to their brands. Panasonic and Quasar have "switch hitter" handle designs and reversible viewfinders, making the camcorders equally suited for right-handers and southpaws. Thoughtful touches in Hitachi and select RCA models, like the

*continued on page 58*

Sleek Shooter: Sharp's VL-L63U Slimcam (top) and Hitachi's VM1600 (bottom) share a fast shutter and a 12x lens.



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## BEST VALUES!

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Flying Erase Head 4 Head Hi-Fi

**HR-VP700U**

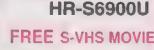
- VCR Plus w/ Cable Box Controller
- Jog/Shuttle Control
- Full Load Center Mechanism

**HR-VP606**

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Audio Dub

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**AZDEN**

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A1 digital	digital special effects
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CAMCORDERS ("free case")	
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GR-AX70	.color viewfinder
GR-AX75U*	.image stabilization
GR-M7PRO*	11x zoom
GR-SZU*	super VHS-C

## VCR's

HR-J600U	4 head Hi-Fi
HR-VP604	jog/shuttle
HR-VP606	VCR Plus
HR-VP700	top of the line!
HR-S6900U	NEW! NEW! NEW!
HR-S6900U	super VHS-C

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PV-IC504	image stabilization
PV-IO604	.color VF/EIS
PV-54	stereo
PV-S64	SVHS/EIS

## FULL SIZE

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PV-M1323	13" Combo
PV-M2043	20" Combo
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WJAVE7	NEW!
WJTTL5	Tilt
WCR's	
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PV-4451	4 Head Hi-Fi
PV-4461	Hi-Fi VCR Plus
PV-4462	audio level meters
PV-4464	jog/shuttle
PV-S4366	super VHS
PV-S4380	built in TBC

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LX-600	CALL
LX-900	CALL

## simo

SPM-3 discharger	\$17.95
SPM-7 charger/discharger	\$34.95
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SPW-81 8mm rewinder	\$24.95
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## TOSHIBA

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M-659	VCR Plus C 3
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M-759	jog/shuttle
M-760	6 video heads

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TD-W709TN	RX-715TN
TD-R461TN	RX-815TN

## SPECIALS

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## 100 Disc CD Changer

## XM-D1

## Mini Disc/Record-Play

## A/V Receivers

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MIXC33	MXC77
MIXC99	

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The Hindenburg



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movies are  
back and  
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# THAT'S A R

**T**hey say that disco is finally coming back. Recent polls tell us that Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter are gaining in public esteem. And bell-bottoms have become the latest fashion accessory. Now that the '70s are back in full force, it seems the perfect time to take a fresh look at another beloved creation from that time, recently reborn in the home-theater era: disaster movies!

Hollywood always marketed disaster — though not always intentionally — from Movietone newsreels to full-blown '30s dramas like *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *San Francisco* and *In Old Chicago*. Each re-enacted renowned tragedies, and made millions doing it. But the disaster movie genre was a Hollywood institution for only about a decade, starting in 1970. These films provided a handy way of putting actors in dramatically tense situations and showed off the latest special effects. It's the latter quality that makes disaster movies especially attractive now on laser-disc — the studios used every whistle and bell available to make these epics, and invented others (remember "Sensurround"?) just to enhance the spectacle of mass destruction.

It all started in 1970 when Universal released *Airport*, based on Arthur Hailey's best-seller about one fateful, snowbound night at a major international hub. The movie was expected to perform well with its major stars (Burt Lancaster, Dean Martin and Helen Hayes), a good balance of romance and drama (spiced by talk about sex and infidelity) and fair special effects. But *Airport* became Universal's most popular picture in more than a decade, and suddenly producers were scrambling for projects that could repeat its success.

The first producer to jump on

the bandwagon was Irwin Allen, who was known in Hollywood for his low-budget blockbuster knock-offs: Cecil B. DeMille did *The Greatest Show on Earth*, so Allen made *The Big Circus*; Disney released *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and Allen countered with *Voyage To the Bottom of the Sea*. Allen took the formula laid out in *Airport* and fine-tuned it, adding kids in jeopardy — always a grabber — and removing topicality. He preferred to couch his drama in vague notions of "evil" big-business vs. the rest of us, which fit the liberal zeitgeist of the time.

His first disaster movie, *The Poseidon Adventure*, dealt with a group of passengers struggling for survival when their ship turns over in mid-ocean, so Allen brought in a variety of popular actors, celebrities and familiar faces. But director Ronald Neame turned the movie into a sort of disaster theme park, built around special effects. It became the highest-grossing movie of 1972, and a genre was born.

Allen followed this with *The Towering Inferno*, which had more impressive special effects. (He also added another eventual fixture of the genre: the token black secondary hero, here in the guise of O.J. Simpson.) Thereafter, Allen was known as "the master of disaster." Meanwhile, Universal, which had started the whole disaster...explosion, devised two *Airport* sequels, *Airport 1975*, with Charlton Heston, and *Airport 1977*, with Jack Lemmon and James Stewart.

There were attempts at big-screen parody (*The Big Bus*) and short-lived television versions of the genre including *Short Walk To Daylight* and the excellent *The Savage Bees*. But by the end of the decade, the genre had descended into unintended self-parody in movies like *The Swarm*, and was being successfully satirized in *Kentucky Fried Movie* and *Airplane!* The latter two were well-liked enough to later end up on laserdisc, whereas the last of the "serious" Hollywood disaster movies, *Meteor*, is mercifully absent from that medium.

What follows is our guide to disaster

movies — the good, the bad and the ugly — as they currently appear on laser-disc. (All these titles are also available on cassette.) None qualifies as a film classic, but almost all are at least good for a few laughs. And if anything can test the mettle of your audio/video setup, it's these explosion- and scream-



**Fire in the Sky:** *The Towering Inferno* attracted talent like Paul Newman and Steve McQueen.

laden epics. Hang on to your hat.

**Airport** (1970; FoxVideo). Unfortunately, the picture that originated the genre still isn't fully letterboxed — that happens only where split-screen images appear. The movie is slick in the old Hollywood style, and the performances by Burt Lancaster and others are presented with a sincerity that later disaster flicks would match only sporadically. The plane engines and a single bomb explosion are less sonically impressive than the ambience of a blizzard here, which is

# MAGEDDON!

## ARMAGEDDON



**From Bugs to Balloons:** Bees wreak havoc on nuclear power plants and good taste in *The Swarm* (above), while terrorists threaten football fans in *Black Sunday* (top).

pretty well simulated in surround—even down to the realistic muffling of ambient sounds.

**The Poseidon Adventure** (1972; FoxVideo). This movie's capsizing ocean liner and resulting fires and explosions make for enough noise to keep your surround system busy and your nerves—or those of your neighbors—on edge. The whole setting lends itself to the kind of sonic ambience one would normally look for in a theme-park ride. The only thing keeping any serious viewer from fully enjoying this is the embarrassment that star Gene Hackman obviously feels in the part of an endlessly shouting minister. Not to worry—other screen legends with even bigger names would demean themselves even more in later disaster movies.

**The Towering Inferno** (1974; FoxVideo). Warner Bros and 20th Century-Fox had both optioned books (*The Tower* and *The Glass Inferno*) about skyscrapers on fire, so they agreed to get together under producer Irwin Allen to make this outsized epic. Allen assembled

a big cast of major names for the first and only time in his life. The cast was led by Paul Newman and Steve McQueen, who reportedly flipped a coin to decide which would play the fire chief and which would play the architect. The laserdisc isn't encoded in surround sound, but most of the action takes place at a distance anyway—when characters are in the center of a fire in this picture, chances are they're dead meat. With Paul Newman trying to sound "with it" and profound at the end ("Let's leave it standing, as a monument to all the bullshit in the world," he says of the burned-out skyscraper), and a lot of up-and-coming players (Dabney Coleman appears in a minor supporting role) looking anonymous, the acting has less to offer than the stunt work and special effects.

**Earthquake** (1974; MCA/Universal). Mark Rob-

son made better movies, but none as profitable as this now topical blockbuster about the destruction of Los Angeles, which reportedly became a hot renter again on tape following January's L.A. quake. *Earthquake* is a dramatic mess—Ava Gardner plays the daughter of Lorne Greene, though they look exactly the same age. (Besides, who's going to believe that Charlton Heston, who spends the picture trying to dump wife Gardner, would sacrifice himself to save her rather than going off to rebuild L.A. with Genevieve Bujold?) The movie won an Oscar for special effects, but they seem tame and even sloppy on this disc, which is panned-and-scanned rather than letterboxed. A lot of the buildings look like toys, although the shots of wrecked freeways are startlingly similar to the results of January's real-life quake.

Sensurround, a process involving the boosting of low-frequency sounds, was developed for *Earthquake*, but the laserdisc's matrixed surround lacks the vividness one would hope for—parts of it sound almost muffled. Indeed, the trailer has better sound than the film, plus less bad acting and dialog.

**The Hindenburg** (1975; MCA/Universal). Robert Wise had been one of the top director/producers of the '60s, and he got an above-average cast of serious performers, including George C. Scott and Anne Bancroft, to play in this picture. But *The Hindenburg* failed by breaking several rules for disaster movies, the most important of which was that its plot embraced serious issues, such as Nazism, anti-Semitism and the political situation in Germany leading up to World War II. Audiences went to these pictures to escape from reality, not delve into it. People who went expecting another *Earthquake* found something more akin to *Ship of Fools*, and a second-rate one at that. The other problem was that the actual footage of the Hindenburg exploding was shot in black-and-white and only runs a few seconds, and had to be stretched out to about six minutes for the ending to have any impact, which it doesn't.

**Rollercoaster** (1977; MCA/Universal). The only movie in the genre ever to be taken seriously by critics, *Rollercoaster* works mostly because it isn't really a disaster movie—it's a detective film about a blackmailer blowing up rollercoasters, written by Richard Levinson and William Link (the team that gave us *Columbo*). The widescreen letterboxed image, showing front-end-forward views of rollercoasters roaring along the tracks, plus tight editing and a very vivid sound mix (the carnival ambience of crowds and music is startling and enveloping) make this a technical delight.



**The Big Heat:** Reporter Fonda investigates nuclear disaster in *The China Syndrome*.

The movie also benefits from the presence of a fine central acting performance by George Segal, whose human, quirky portrayal of the investigator on the case makes this picture eminently

watchable.

**Black Sunday** (1977; Paramount). Newly reissued in letterboxed format, *Black Sunday* is probably the disaster movie of greatest interest today, because its plot—about an Arab terrorist plan to kill 80,000 people at the Super Bowl—anticipated the World Trade Center bombing of 1993, and because it was based on a novel by Thomas Harris, whose *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* are extremely popular. Unfortunately for director John Frankenheimer, that very plot line assured its failure back in 1977—people did not go to these pictures to hear about politics or international strife, much less immerse themselves in Arab-Israeli conflicts. The stereo sound on the new laserdisc is nicely directional, and the widescreen image recaptures important effects missing from the pan-and-scan edition. Robert Shaw works hard as the Israeli agent after the terrorists, and Marthe Keller and Bruce Dern are chilling as the brains behind the plot, but in the end, their work is compromised by the Goodyear blimp—it just looks too friendly to be an agent of destruction, regardless of what explosives are supposed to be on board.

**The Swarm** (1978; Warner). "We have contact sir—bees, millions of bees!" exclaims a pilot at the opening of this last of Allen's disaster movies, a box-office disaster he made the mistake of directing himself. *The Swarm*'s main virtue is that it provides the most ridiculous ways yet for aging stars and character actors to die. It's difficult to say which is worse: the plot, about a swarm of "Africanized" killer bees that destroys missile bases, towns and nuclear power plants, or the dialog. But every time Richard Widmark's Air Force general talks about "The war against the Africans," one can only blanch. Henry Fonda walks through his part as a toxicologist, and Bradford Dillman and Michael Caine embarrass themselves throughout. But the strangest thing in the picture is the delusional giant bee that appears before the victims.

**The China Syndrome** (1979; Columbia TriStar). The real end of the disaster movie cycle took place with the release of this serious, topical drama, which showed what a real-life nuclear disaster *might* mean. The picture was made with a serious intent and, as a result, is much better crafted than any "disaster" movie, with good performances

by Jane Fonda, Michael Douglas, Jack Lemmon and Richard Herd, all nicely drawn together by the late director James Bridges. But it ended up drawing huge audiences because the accident at Three Mile Island occurred while the movie was in release, thus giving it all the topicality of a nightly newscast. People didn't go to this movie for escape, however, so much as release and some (possibly misplaced) edification about nuclear power. *The China Syndrome* did for the issue of nuclear hazards what *Airport* could never do for air-travel safety, what *The Towering Inferno* failed to accomplish for fire safety, and what *Earthquake* couldn't do about...well, you know. ■

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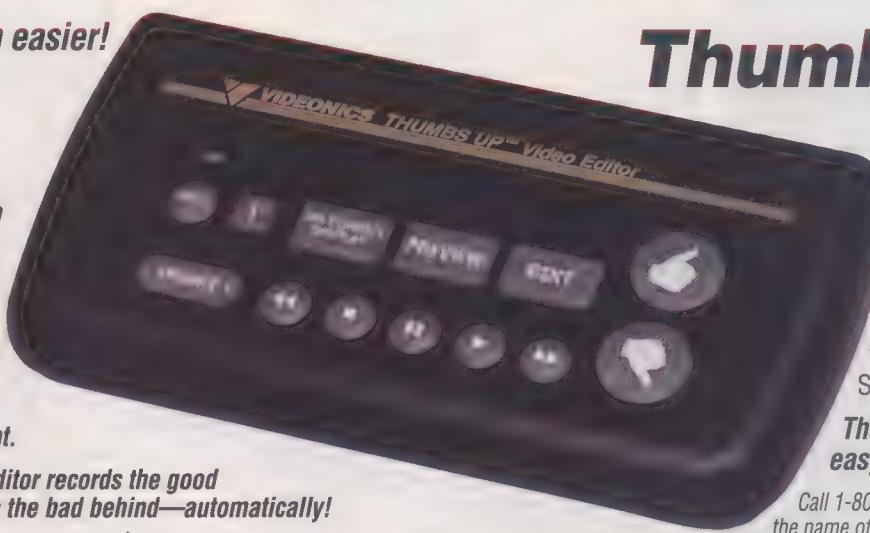


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# WILD

continued from page 39

ing, where your air tanks only last from 45 minutes to an hour, Nadal figures he can shoot for about 30 minutes per dive. During a dive with his camcorder, he rarely goes below 140 feet. "Below that, you can't get a good shot without bringing your own light," he explains. Though he prefers to shoot by available light, Nadal also uses an Ikelite underwater video light for shooting night dives. "The Caribbean is an interesting place to dive at night," he remarks, "because it's safer, it's warmer, and you never know what you're going to meet."

Interestingly, Nadal sees parallels between his non-diving show, *New York Gossip*, and his Caribbean diving adventures. "You have to have the same sort of distance," he says, "You've got the publicists, who are like sharks, and you have to fend them off to get to the stars to chat a little bit!"

"Diving and producing isn't yet a profession for me," he goes on, "though it will be. One piece I did about a year and a half ago was included in a video for a private airplane tour of the Bahamas." (Nadal invites those seeking more info on undersea video to contact him at Blue Lemon Video Works, Box 796, Southampton, New York 11969.)

## SHOOTING UNDER SAIL

By Ty Harrington

The day rental of a 26-foot power boat out of Miami seemed the perfect occasion for taking along a camcorder and shooting the afternoon's cruise. With waves breaking across the bow and neon-sailed windsurfers leaping across our wake under a bright Florida sky, I couldn't wait to see my footage — only to discover, when I did, that a see-sawing horizon made most of the shots sea-sickeningly unwatchable.

The action-packed decks of small boats, be they sail or motor, are powerful settings for dramatic footage. Yet for the same reasons, they present significant challenges. On rivers, lakes or seas, your camcorder sessions will be inherently kinetic and packed with the unexpected — if you're prepared.

Before you pick up your camcorder, tour your vessel physically and mentally. Be it a dingy or a yacht, climb around, look inside, outside and over the side. Where will you be able to duck out of the waves' way? Where's the best vantage point for shooting the helmsman? Assess your adversaries, especially tight angles, the effect of constant motion and the camcorder's number one ene-

my — moisture.

Moisture is everywhere afloat. The size of the vessel and the daring of your shots determine the risk, but no matter how quickly or carefully you intend to work, experience has taught many a videographer there'll always be at least one unforeseen wave. What to do? Waterproof housings will do the job, but they're costly, and they limit access to controls. Play it safe most easily by slipping your camcorder into a clear plastic bag. Cut a hole for the lens so you can attach a wide-angle adaptor to handle the close quarters on most boats.

However, even low glare and rich colors won't compensate for a rocking bottom. Despite the temptation to illustrate a vessel's motion by shooting with the horizon askew, if you do this for more than a few seconds, viewers will be sure to rebel.

Invited once to sail aboard a 50-footer along the barrier reef of Belize, I set about to beat this problem, which frequently ruins ship-board footage. First, I tried mounting my camcorder on a Steadicam JR. The setup worked pretty well, helping me shoot level wide-angle pans and fluid below-deck footage. But its delicate stabilizing mechanism failed in the 15-knot breeze beyond the lee of shore. Hand-holding the camcorder proved no use at all but the widest settings. And tripods were too rigid.

My solution proved to be a monopod. It works well even for moderate telephoto shots, and can adapt to virtually any shipboard nook you'll encounter. When the captain shouted, "Dolphins in the bow wake," I discovered the monopod could also double as a boom, enabling the camcorder to be extended, raised or lowered into fantastic, dramatic video vantage points.

A wireless microphone with a wind filter completes my ditty bag of essentials. You'll want it to clearly soundtrack the crew's talk, the clink of the anchor chain and the clang of the ship's bell from a deck-length away.

An FM microphone with a wind filter completes my ditty bag of essentials. You'll want it to clearly soundtrack the crew's talk, the flapping of the flag, the clink of the anchor chain and the clang of the ship's bell from a deck-length away.

Ignore the sense that small spaces are limiting. Use a separate tape to record, and later insert-edit, the details that make the vessel seaworthy: the rotating of the compass, the churn of the prop, the set of the sails, the crew's weathered hands. Most importantly, be aware as you set out that it will take a tape or two to find your videographic sea legs, be ye landlubber or wharf rat.



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## MULTIMEDIA

continued from page 46

musical instrument or a MIDI-equipped sound card), CD audio, even QuickTime video.

I laid out the audio clips along the time line and simply dragged the graphics elements into the spots in time where I wanted them to occur. A multitude of special effects is conveniently provided, like wipes, dissolves, reveals, etc. Once everything is laid out and satisfactory, *Producer Pro* lets you "print" the production to video in real time. For readers who have tried authoring multimedia projects like this I can relate the *Producer Pro* experience in just one sentence: Everything worked just the way I wanted it to on the first try. 'Nuff said?

### NOW FOR THE EASY PART

All the multimedia elements had been printed to a Hi8 cassette, which would serve as one of the source tapes for a traditional off-line video edit. I had previously had good experience with *Video Toolkit*, a simple logging and editing program that controls two video decks from the modem and printer ports

of the Mac. The newest version, 2.0, features even more drivers to control an ample selection of camcorders and VCRs. For decks that don't feature Control-L or Control-S capabilities, *Video Toolkit* 2.0 also features an infrared code emitter that can work almost any consumer video gear that responds to remote control.

The VCRs I used for the edit were the Sony Hi8 V-deck and the new Sony EV-C100, a Hi8 VCR. The latter deck was too new to have its own *Video Toolkit* driver (though Abbate offers constant driver updates for a nominal fee), but worked well (most of the time) using drivers for the Sony EV-C3 or EV-C8. I decided to post-stripe the source tapes with Sony's RC time code, which would give me frame-accurate (or nearly so) edits.

The logging and assembly process on *Video Toolkit* is simplicity itself. Both master and slave decks are controlled by onscreen "remotes." Cue up the clips, punch in the start and stop points, put together an edit decision list (EDL) and hit an "assemble" command. Voila — you can sit back and drink coffee while your production edits itself. Although there

were a few glitches, which I attributed to the fact that the EV-C3 driver wasn't an exact fit for the EV-C100, the final edited master tape came off without a hitch.

### WAS IT GOOD?

Frankly speaking, I was somewhat amazed that I was able to do everything I needed to do for this production using just the 660, a camcorder and two VCRs — and if I wanted to scrimp a bit, I could have substituted the camcorder for one of the VCRs. Everything about the production was plug 'n' play — connect the audio and video sources to the computer, boot the software and go. There were no hardware incompatibilities, no IRQ conflicts or other arcane technobARRIERS. Connections were as simple as hooking up a VCR to a TV, and working with the multimedia elements was really as effortless as working with a word processor or a database file.

While Apple certainly won't be the only company to offer AV capability as stock equipment on its computers, it deserves applause for being the first on the block. As the worlds of video and audio become ever more linked with computer technology, machines like the AV series make perfect sense. The stock AV Macs aren't what I'd call a good computer for video production; after all, pro-quality full-frame/full-motion video (such as is offered by the Avid Media Suite and other hardware-based solutions) costs tens of thousands of dollars. But as a multimedia machine, the AV Macs are killer. Now that I've had a go-round with one, I can't wait to work on the next production. ■

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## BUYING GUIDE

continued from page 50

CC547, include digital Instant Zoom, which magnifies the image 1.5 times in a wince, and an automatic wind filter. This low-band filter goes to work when a specific whistling frequency is detected. It also remembers to cut out automatically when you move into a quieter zone.

Magnavox's innovative Smart Edit control, conveniently near the trigger button, allows you to review recorded footage without having to move your hand or eye from the viewfinder or switch the camcorder into play mode. When the Smart Edit slide switch is thrown, the rocker control that usually operates the zoom lens becomes a forward/reverse picture shuttle control for reviewing footage in the viewfinder and for editing out bad sections.

All full-size VHS camcorders have become quieter and more efficient, with

integrated circuitry doing away with clickety-clack solenoid controls as well as scores of energy-zapping parts. New models require just half the power needed to run camcorders from the mid-'80s, which is why rechargeable batteries have grown smaller and lighter, even though they still use lead-acid or nickel-cadmium chemistry. Today's two-hour camcorder batteries (standard in many models) add as little as a half pound to the package.

Low-light shooting capability is also a hot feature in VHS camcorders. Minimum levels are typically quoted as one or two lux, although industry-wide standards for measuring light sensitivity are still not set. You'll also find models with two-page titlers, and separate audio and video dubbing capability, which is not possible with 8mm and Hi8 models.

Some VHS camcorders also feature bookmark search, which looks for the starting points of segments on a tape; the Video Index Search System, which lays down a segment record code readable by VISS-equipped VCRs; tape-time remaining counters, and battery power gauges. Flying erase heads, for glitch-free edits between recorded segments, are now standard in the format.

What's not desired? Most notably, S-VHS. The high-res version of VHS comes in just one consumer model, Panasonic's PV-S770, and two primo-priced units from Panasonic Broadcast, the AG-455U and the AG-460, which has a two-CCD image sensor.

Nor is hi-fi stereo sound a priority among VHS shooters. We didn't find this feature in a single model. On another feature front, the twin-lens (wide/zoom) feature recently available in Sharp's full-size TwinCam wasn't appreciated by a sufficient number of consumers to keep the model in production, even though it was a joy to use.

Digital special effects, popular in high-end compact camcorders, are much less of a big-deal among full-size VHS models, with the FX menu typically limited to one to three wipes and fades. Color viewfinders are still considered a luxury item, brightening your perspective in just four models. Almost as rare are fill and color-enhancement lights, which are now nearly a universal appendage of VHS-C camcorders.

Take note that the Hitachi camcorders detailed in the accompanying chart are so new, you may not find them in stores just yet. On the other hand,

you may find some of Hitachi's '93 models like the VM-2500A (\$900), the VM-4400A (\$1,100) and VM-5400A (\$1,400) still being offered through both Hitachi and Minolta distribution channels.

In addition, two holdover models from Panasonic Broadcast, the AG-460 and the AG-195U, are likely to be replaced in late fall or early winter, as are the VL-L390U and VL-L63U from Sharp, the SCF703 from Samsung and Goldstar's GVC-425. ■

## TECH TIP

### Spare remote

Sony's RMT401 remote control, which was supplied for the tuner/timers on older 8mm VCRs, can also be used to run standard tape transport functions on many Sony 8mm camcorders. It worked on my Ricoh R87-H, which is similar to Sony's CCD-TR200. Even better, it will also start the camcorder's recording function, which the supplied remote won't do.

Geo D. Nyberg  
Aigincourt, Ontario

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# TAPES & DISCS

## RELEASES

gorgeous and full of interesting ideas. What it needs is heart.

It takes place among the demi-monde of 1870s New York, where handsome young attorney Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) makes public his engagement to the lovely May Welland (Winona Ryder) but finds himself increasingly drawn to her scandalous, unconventional cousin Countess Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), who shares his need to escape suffocating convention. Their impossible love takes place in a world of arcane ritual and extravagant beauty; the frequent images of flowers are a metaphor for the hot-house atmosphere of an enclosed uni-

protectiveness beneath the surface.

I don't mean to damn *The Age of Innocence* with faint praise — even an ambitious failure by a great director should be seen. The tape's pan-and-scan transfer benefits the actors but betrays the film's wealth of physical detail.

—Sol Louis Siegel

### Carlito's Way

1993. Al Pacino, Sean Penn, Penelope Ann Miller; dir. Brian De Palma. Surround, cc. (R) 145 min. priced for rental. LD \$39.98. THX LD letterboxed \$44.98. MCA/Universal.

Manhattan, 1975. When drug lord Carlito Brigante (Al Pacino) is sprung from a 30-year prison sentence on a legal technicality, everyone expects him to resume his old ways. But he wants out of the rackets. Carlito's plan is to coast on his reputation just long enough to pile up some cash and retire to a legit business in the Bahamas. But honor demands that he do a favor for his best friend Dave (Sean Penn), a gang lawyer in over his head who may just drag Carlito down with him.

After the debacle of *Bonfire of the Vanities* and the self-indulgence of *Raising Cain*, Brian DePalma is back in form with this skillfully crafted crime thriller, his most enjoyable movie since *The Untouchables*. He limits himself to two showy set pieces, a shoot-out in a back-room club and the subterranean finale.



Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder in *The Age of Innocence*

## FEATURE FILMS

### *The Age of Innocence*

1993. Daniel Day-Lewis, Michelle Pfeiffer, Winona Ryder; dir. Martin Scorsese. Surround, cc. (PG) 138 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$39.95. Columbia TriStar.

The films of Martin Scorsese usually come straight from the gut, so it's fascinating to see him working from his head. His adaptation of Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence* is unfailingly

verso. I think Scorsese was interested in the dynamics of a society where people have ceased to think for themselves, and how they impose upon those who do. In the process, he seems to have put a straitjacket on his own emotions even as his characters do so on screen. Day-Lewis and Pfeiffer do good work within their restraints, but only Ryder seems to thrive, suggesting fierce



Carlito's Way

# EDITOR'S CHOICE

by

kenneth korman

Both sequences are beautifully paced and rate among his best work, despite the loss of DePalma's careful widescreen compositions on the panned-and-scanned video.

Carlito may be another Latino gangster, but comparisons to *Scarface* end there. Pacino uses the same deeper voice and booming projection that won him an Oscar for *Scent of a Woman*, though this role is more finely shaded. Sean Penn is almost as good despite a frizzy perm that makes him look like Art Garfunkel. The only weak scenes are those featuring Penelope Ann Miller as Carlito's girlfriend, particularly a laughable seduction that will do nothing to alleviate De Palma's reputation as a misogynist.

—M. Faust



Soul Survivor: Jeff Bridges faces life in *Fearless*.

## Fearless

1993. Jeff Bridges, Rosie Perez; dir. Peter Weir. Surround, cc. (R) 122 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$39.98. Warner.

After walking away from a devastating plane crash where he saves the lives of many fellow passengers, San Francisco architect Max Klein (Jeff Bridges) has every reason to feel on top of the world. *Fearless*, however, doesn't pretend life is that simple. Hailed in the press as good Samaritan, Max grows progressively stranger in the wake of the disaster, rejecting his family and bonding with a traumatized fellow survivor (Rosie Perez) as he struggles to comprehend his experience.

In addition to the Oscar-nominated Perez, director Peter Weir's heart-rending drama boasts other fine players, including Isabella Rossellini as the concerned wife, John Turturro, playing a shrink who tries to pierce Max's denial, and Tom Hulce as a cheerfully manipu-

lative attorney. But this is Bridges' show all the way, and he turns in a stunning performance. His easy confidence, which can seem like smugness on a bad day, suits Max perfectly. Alternating between cool isolation and belligerent good cheer, this uneasy survivor tries everything to avoid the reality of what's happened to him, until he runs out of tricks. Though the narrative occasionally loses its momentum over two hours, Bridges' deep anguish, underscored by horrifying flashbacks to the moments before the crash, gives *Fearless* a primal, unsettling punch.

—Jon Young

## Ruby in Paradise

1993. Ashley Judd, Dorothy Lyman; dir. Victor Nunez. Mono (R) 115 min. priced for rental. Republic.

"There's more to life than working in uncle Jack's store and taking crap from men." So says Ruby Gissing in the opening minutes of this extraordinary movie by Victor Nunez, which just might be the best picture this critic has seen in years.

Ruby is running from a rotten life in Tennessee to an uncertain future in Florida's Panama City beach. It takes a little doing for her to find "paradise," and the one she finds isn't perfect or permanent. But the story of her struggle to get there is so beautifully told that it bears repeated watching. Ashley Judd and Dorothy Lyman (playing Ruby's employer), along with director Nunez, deserved Academy Award nominations for their work in this vividly textured and nuanced drama about life, love, despair and hope on the wrong side of the tracks.

The videocassette is very nicely mastered, capturing the rich tones of Alex Vlacos' cinematography, and the soundtrack — which features a couple of good rock numbers presented in surprisingly unobtrusive fashion — is crisp and vibrant, with fine definition to the smallest sound element. All of which only enhances this lovely, gritty, inspiring movie.

—Bruce Eder

## Olivier, Olivier

1993. Gregoire Colin, Brigitte Rouan; dir. Agnieszka Holland. (R) 110 min. priced for rental. LD \$34.95. Columbia TriStar.

Part mystery yarn and part psychological study, *Olivier, Olivier* offers vivid snapshots of a family under incredible

Don't let the dry, bookish title fool you. *Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography* (CBS/Fox; VHS for rental, laserdisc \$39.99) is probably the most entertaining documentary you'll ever see. No matter if you're a laser fanatic, an amateur videographer, whatever — if you care enough about visual media to read *Video Magazine*, you'll love this film.

Visions of

Light uses clips from more than 125 movies — plus dozens of interviews with the people who shot them — to rewrite the history of movies in terms of pure visual expression. It takes us from the early days of the "free" camera through the advent of sound and color, the studio system, *Citizen Kane*, film noir, wide-screen, the French new wave and the unprecedented freedoms of the '60s. Many of cinematography's all-time greats (Vittorio Storaro, Michael Chapman, et al.) get to speak for themselves. Mostly they take on the air of dedicated craftsmen as they illuminate their art and pay homage to their forbears. The clips pop up to illustrate their words and ideas, giving the film a breezy, conversational tone. Just seeing the title of each excerpted film followed by the name of the cinematographer — not the director or the stars — is a thrill in itself. *Visions of Light* was long overdue.

The cumulative effect of the film clips and commentary is staggering. (All the scenes are presented in their original aspect ratios, of course.) If you don't consider yourself a film buff, watch out — *Visions of Light* might just change your mind. But even the most devoted cinephiles will come away from this film seeing their favorite art form...in a new light. At the very least, you can expect it to cost you lots of money at the video store as you catch up on all the great movies you missed.



# TAPES & DISCS

stress. At the best of times, the Duvals of Provence seem troubled: Elisabeth (Brigitte Rouan) displays an unhealthy attachment to her nine-year-old son Olivier (Emmanuel Rozof), to the dismay of husband Serge (Francois Cluzet) and older daughter Nadine (Faye Gatteau).



Too Close  
For Comfort:  
A mother  
obsesses over  
her son in  
*Olivier, Olivier*.

And when the boy mysteriously disappears one sunny day, bitterness and resentment erupt on all sides.

Six years later, a teenager (Gregoire Colin) claiming to be Olivier comes forward. Mom accepts the young man, but his father isn't sure and Nadine (now played by Marina Golovine) openly suspects he's a phony. The pursuit of the truth about Olivier keeps this absorbing drama at a steady boil, but director and writer Agnieszka Holland's gift for delineating commonplace emotions gives the film its soul. It's heartbreakingly Elizabeth's preference for Olivier wounds her daughter, and fascinating to see Nadine's jealousy resurface with the apparent return of her brother. Those wary of subtitles, even easy-to-read yellow ones like these, should put aside their reservations. The raw emotions running through *Olivier, Olivier* — reflected in faces, body language and tones of voice — express universal truths that transcend language barriers. —JY

## Flesh and Bone

1993. Dennis Quaid, Meg Ryan, James Caan; dir. Steve Koves. Surround, cc. (R) 127 min. priced for rental. Paramount.

Steve Koves, the man who made the atmospheric sleeper hit, *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, returns with the atmospheric *Flesh and Bone*. Audiences ignored this brooding, film noirish dra-

ma about the nature of guilt, and you can see why: It is heavy and unrelenting, with a dark view of humanity and man's chances at true love.

Dennis Quaid is the haunted, haunting protagonist, the man with a secret load of guilt. Meg Ryan plays the woman he meets, a character whose life has been ruined by the tragedy Quaid initiated as a small boy. From that tiny thread, writer/director Koves weaves a movie so rich with texture (ably assisted by Thomas Newman's evocative score and Phillippe Rousselot's beautifully stark photography) that you hardly notice how thin the material actually is. The cast is fine in heavily nuanced roles, with James Caan the flashiest as the evil dad who causes all the problems.

*Flesh and Bone* is Faulkner by way of Graham Greene and James M. Cain, a disturbing fable about love and death, sin and suffering, and redemption through murder. The movie may take you down, but it is a fascinating, thought-provoking trip. See it. —TS

## The Saint of Fort Washington

1993. Danny Glover, Matt Dillon; dir. Tim Hunter. Surround, cc. (R) 104 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$34.98. Warner.

This tale of two homeless men in New York — a Vietnam vet (Danny Glover) who's had some bad breaks and a young schizophrenic (Matt Dillon) with buried talents — comes straight to

video after playing only a few theaters. It deserved better. The script takes us through every station of an uncaring and often hostile world, and director Tim Hunter, though not exactly subtle, manages some stirring images. And Glover and Dillon give powerful and deeply affecting performances. The picture may owe a debt to *Of Mice and Men*, but repays it handsomely. The tape presentation is excellent.

—Sol Louis Siegel

## Cool Runnings

1993. John Candy, Doug E. Doug; dir. Jon Turteltaub. Surround. (PG) 98 min. priced for rental. Walt Disney.

As the ice antics of the recent Olympics proved yet again, truth is truly stranger than fiction, and frequently more entertaining. But in adapting the real-life story of four Jamaicans who launched the tropical island's first bobsled team at the 1988 Calgary games, the folks at Disney admit they took great creative liberties. If the coach of that team (played here by John Candy) really did cheat in previous international competition, how was he allowed to return? If he didn't, what was he paid to allow such slander to be part of this film?

Nagging questions of verisimilitude aside, this is a rollicking sports adventure suitable for all ages, a comic *Rocky* with a reggae beat and relatively few punches thrown. There is the compulsory bar brawl between our heroes and the East German team (I do grow weary of Prussian accents as a signal for audi-

Tubsledders:  
Jamaican athletes  
prepare for Olympic com-  
petition in *Cool  
Runnings*.



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What a Character!  
*Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll*  
preserves Eric Bogosian's  
one-man show

ences to boo), but the overall tone is upbeat and uplifting.

Neither artistic impression nor technical merit is a given in Disney's live-action features, which generally plow safe middle ground. (The company's true auteurs are down the hall, doing animation.) But *Cool Runnings*, like the sport it depicts, is a zippy ride down a well-charted course. A winner, yes, but in the bronze medal category.

—Marianne Meyer

## Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll

1993. Eric Bogosian; dir. John McNaughton. Stereo. (R) 96 min. \$19.98. MPI.

The monolog is a rarefied performance art, and there aren't many practitioners who can hold the solo spotlight without resorting to stand-up comedy or musical accompaniment. Spalding Gray is one. But Eric Bogosian is the one you want next to you in a street fight. His perceptive re-creations of the human riffraff found on gritty street corners and high-tech boardrooms are a muscular mix of twisted willpower and modern paranoia.

In this show, recorded over three years ago in front of a live audience, Bogosian brings 11 characters to vivid life. So vivid, in fact, this New York subway veteran could swear Bogosian may have transcribed the rants of a particularly persistent underground beggar who once haunted the F train to Brooklyn.

While his language is strewn with rough, four-letter words, Bogosian is no Howard Stern. His humor comes from subtleties rooted in telling details — how a legal shark similarly coddles his wife, mistress and business partner on the phone, the glimmer of vulnerability in an Italian street tough describing a disastrous stag party.

Bogosian allows you to eavesdrop on those fascinating but frightening characters you shy away from on the street, and shows you the humanity within each of them.

—MM

## A Bronx Tale

1993. Robert De Niro, Chazz Palminteri, Lillo Brancato; dir. De Niro. Surround, cc. (R) 125 min. priced for rental. HBO.

*A Bronx Tale*, Robert De Niro's flashy directorial debut, is definitely De Niro territory. The material is gritty, realistic, and oh-so-New-York-Italian, filled with such Mafia grotesques as Jimmy Whispers, Tony Toupee and JoJo the Whale. Based on a 90-minute monolog written and performed by Chazz Palminteri, the movie tells the story of a teenager, Calogero (Lillo Brancato), torn between his honest, working class father, Lorenzo (De Niro) and a street-wise, charismatic crime boss (Palminteri).

When Palminteri originally performed the material in Los Angeles in 1980, it ran for nine months. No wonder: The movie has a vivid verisimilitude, from the voice-over narration, the excellent period details, and the well-delineated mob characters (mostly played by non-actors). De Niro's directing is top-notch, and if the movie has any problem, it's in the script: an occasional lapse into redundant narration and a Dickensian tendency to tie every loose end into a neat bow by the last reel.

But that's carping. *A Bronx Tale* is an impressive achievement: moving, funny, and exciting, with a telling message about taking responsibility for your life. As Lorenzo says, "There is nothing sadder than wasted talent." No problem of that here.

—Tom Soter

## TAPES & DISCS



### Barjo

1993. Anne Brochet, Hippolyte Giradot; dir. Jerome Boivin. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 85 min. priced for rental. Fox Lorber.

It may be based on a novel by Philip K. Dick, but this dark French comedy couldn't be more different from *Blade Runner* or *Total Recall*. Director Jerome Boivin also gave us *Baxter*, and like that film *Barjo* looks at life from the perspective of an inquiring outsider, in this case an oddball writer (Hippolyte Giradot) who obsessively records everyday activities. Forced to move in with his uninhibited sister (Anne Brochet) and her husband (Richard Bohringer), a middle-aged businessman, Barjo becomes the catalyst that drives their emotional problems to cataclysmic proportions. The broad humor of *Barjo's* endlessly naive investigations (observing his hosts requires him to open a new file on "Nonreproductive copulatory exercise") may not be fully integrated with the black comedy of an impossible marriage between a man who wants order and a woman who wants "everything and its opposite," but at least the two threads are equally amusing.

—M. Faust

### Night and Day

1991. Guiliane Londez, Thomas Langmann; dir. Chantal Akerman. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 90 min. priced for rental. Fox Lorber.

A French film about a romantic triangle might sound like hot stuff, but *Night and Day* couldn't be less erotic. Instead, director and co-writer Chantal Akerman uses the story of a woman caught between two blindly devoted

men as an excuse for a rambling treatise on the nature of experience, love and loneliness. Although Julie (Guilaine Londez), Jack (Thomas Langmann) and Joseph (Francois Negret) all succumb to a voracious sensual obsession, their passions leave them strangely lifeless.

Jack and Julie spend their days in bed; at night, he drives a cab while she walks the Paris streets alone. Though both profess their utter contentment, this fragile paradise crumbles when Julie meets Joseph, the car's daytime driver, and begins a secret affair with him. Enveloped in a haze of sleep deprivation, she successfully accommodates both admirers, at least for a while. The philosophical potential of this familiar situation is severely limited by the flat characters. Julie's blank smile makes her awkward existential musings seem simple-minded, while the guys express intense feelings in a mopey monotone. When Jack insists he couldn't be happier and doesn't show a trace of emotion, you'll think you're watching *Young Zombies in Love*.

—Jon Young

### Freaked

1993. Alex Winter, Randy Quaid, Mr. T; dir. Winter, Tom Stern. Stereo, cc. (PG-13) 79 min. priced for rental. Columbia TriStar.

Loud, fast, dumb, crude, gross and obnoxious—and we mean that in a nice way. Alex Winter ("Bill" from the *Bill and Ted* movies) and partner Tom Stern created this demented comedy about a toxic fertilizer that is used by sideshow proprietor Elijah C. Skuggs (Randy

Oil and Water:  
*Barjo's* Anne Brochet  
and Richard Bohringer  
are hopelessly mismatched.

Quaid) to create custom-made freaks. The result is like *Gremlins* made by the *Airplane* team, though the attitude is pure MTV-rude. And with Mr. T in a dress and Bobcat Goldthwait as carnival star "Sock Head" (great death scene), we'll even forgive that nasty Winona Ryder dig.

—M. Faust

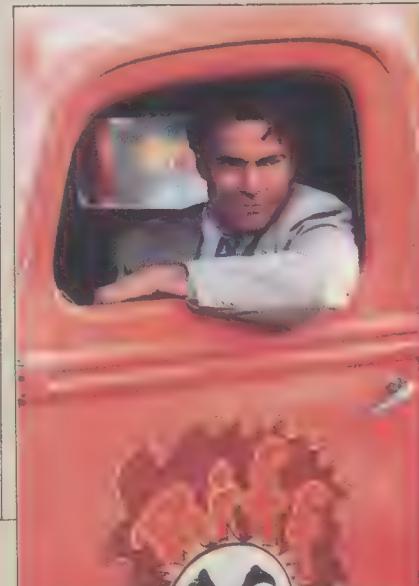
### Wilder Napalm

1993. Debra Winger, Dennis Quaid; dir. Glenn Gordon Caron. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 109 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$34.98. Columbia TriStar.

Based on the kind of show-offy scripts that get top grades in film school, *Wilder Napalm* is a self-consciously weird comedy that coasts along amiably for an hour before collapsing under its pretensions. Feuding brothers Wilder and Wallace Foudroyant (Arliss Howard and Dennis Quaid) share the power to start fires at will. But while mild-mannered Wilder wants to repress this gift, unscrupulous Wallace wants to exploit it. (If that sounds like a cross between *Firestarter* and TV's *Bewitched*, it's intentional.) Caught between them is Vida (Debra Winger), the passionate goofball who threw over Quaid to marry Howard. Everything is a big metaphor, but none of it leads anywhere except a meaningless special effects finale. Director Glenn Gordon Caron and the three appealing stars make this nonsense better than it has any right to be, but they can only do so much.

—M. Faust

Flame Thrower: Wallace Foudroyant (Dennis Quaid) can start fires at will in *Wilder Napalm*.



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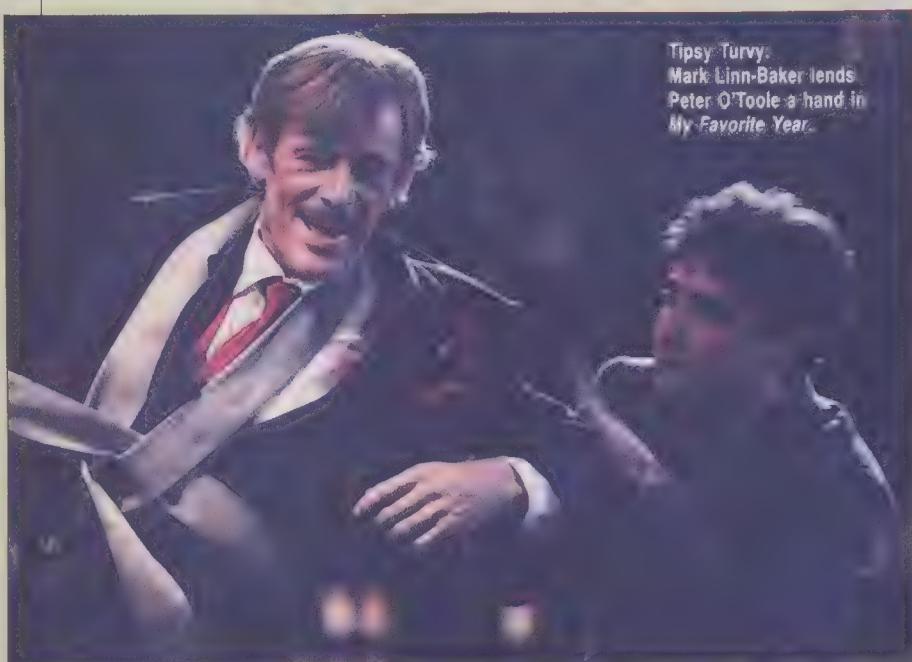
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# TAPES & DISCS



Tipsy Turvy.  
Mark Linn-Baker lends  
Peter O'Toole a hand in  
*My Favorite Year*.

## LASERDISCS

### *My Favorite Year*

1982. Peter O'Toole, Mark Linn-Baker, Jessica Harper, Joseph Bologna; dir. Richard Benjamin. Digital mono, letterboxed. (PG) 92 min. CLV 2 sides \$34.98. MGM/UA.

For Benjy Stone (Mark Linn-Baker), a freshman writer on NBC's *Comedy Cavalcade*, 1954 was a magical year. And from the moment you hear the opening strains of Nat King Cole's "Stardust" and see twinkling images of Manhattan, you know that *My Favorite Year* — an endearing tribute to the Golden Age of live television — is aglow with magic.

What sets 1954 apart is Alan Swann (the smashing Best Actor nominee Peter O'Toole), an Errol Flynn-type screen star who tipples till he topples. Benjy is ordered to swashbuckler-sit the *Cavalcade* guest and — with the help of an admirable supporting cast, including Joseph Bologna as the Sid Caesar-esque host, Lainie Kazan as Benjy's oh-so-Brooklyn mother and Bill Macy as the "tower of Jell-O" head writer — the two proceed from one hilarious misadventure to another, culminating in a triumphant conclusion worthy of *Hear My Song*.

In the duo's most telling exchange, before Swann dives off a rooftop à la one of his pictures, Benjy cries, "That was a movie. This is real life!" To which the

actor replies, "What is the difference?" Not much here, considering the larger-than-life antics, letterboxed and framed perfectly on this fine-looking disc.

As Richard Benjamin's directorial debut (he later helmed the unbearable *My Stepmother Is an Alien* and *Mermaids*), *My Favorite Year* is often structured as just so many vignettes. But what it lacks in fluency, it makes up for in heart.

—April P. Bernard

### *The Clint Eastwood Trilogy*

1964/65/67. *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More*, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Clint Eastwood, Eli Wallach, Lee Van Cleef; dir. Sergio Leone. Digital mono, letterboxed. (NR) 394 min. CLV 8 sides \$99.95. MGM/UA.

The best thing about this box set is the chance to appreciate all three *Dollars* films not as Clint Eastwood's star-making vehicles, but as Sergio Leone's self-portrait of the artist as a young visual stylist. As the films unwind, you see the gradual growth of Leone's cinematic vocabulary that would culminate in his 1969 operatic masterwork, *Once Upon A Time in the West*. In fact, it was after an intense afternoon of privately screening this trilogy that Henry Fonda agreed to accept the bad guy role in *Once Upon a Time*.

This is not to say that these films aren't enjoyable simply as quintessential Clint. But bear in mind Eastwood and Leone didn't invent the western anti-

hero, they simply redefined him. Essayist Robert Warshow describes western heroes as loners seeking redemption by their actions, with the films' denouements the defining moments for each protagonist. This applies to Alan Ladd in *Shane*, Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, John Wayne in *The Searchers*, and Gregory Peck in *The Gunfighter*. But in the *Dollars* trilogy, there is no redemption for the "Man With No Name"; the films do not represent defining moments in his life. Each constitutes merely another day on the range, which is why these films work as a series. At the end of each, he takes only the money — and no moral — off into the sunset, ready for his next adventure.

The boxed set uses the same 2.35:1 letterboxed transfer as MGM's single-title releases of the past few years, with the same minor scratches that occasionally mar the original prints. But this time we get chapter encoding and better side breaks. The box set is also cheaper than buying all three discs separately.

—Stewart Wolpin

### *Thelonious Monk—American Composer*

### *The World According to John Coltrane*

1990/1991. Monk: Randy Weston; dir. Matthew Seig. Coltrane: Tommy Flanagan, Wayne Shorter; dir. Robert Palmer, Toby Byron. Digital stereo. (NR) 60 min. each, CLV 1 side \$39.98 each. BMG.

It's a measure of the greatness of Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane that both remain vital today. To break new ground is one thing; to sound as relevant as today's headlines is another, but they still do. Capturing their brilliance on video is harder than you might think, however, as two discs in the Masters of American Music series prove.

*Thelonious Monk—American Composer* offers a mixture of performance footage and interviews with admirers such as Randy Weston and Billy Taylor. Identifying Monk as a bearer of the stride-piano tradition of James P. Johnson, the documentary hails his ability to communicate through those distinctive angular melodies. Unfortunately, the creators of this hodgepodge don't share that confidence in his art: Concert clips are cut annoyingly short or smothered by voice-overs, making it impossible to

get the true flavor of his luminous compositions. Tantalizing snippets abound, but this hour is more frustrating than fulfilling.

Though *The World According to John Coltrane* employs the same format, it's more satisfying. While colleagues like Wayne Shorter and Rashied Ali offer insights, and historical notes touch on everything from Coltrane's brief partnership with Monk to his spiritual leanings, the music always comes first. Extended segments devoted to "My Favorite Things," "Alabama" and "Impressions" capture the saxophonist's genius in full flight, weaving a dense, beautiful web of sound. Coltrane's provocative noise isn't for everyone, but at least this intelligent program gives you enough music to decide for yourself.

—JY

## Indochine

1992. Catherine Deneuve, Vincent Perez; dir. Regis Wargnier. Surround, subtitled, letterboxed. (R) 154 min. 3 sides CLV \$39.95. Columbia TriStar.

*Indochine*, the 1992 Foreign Film Oscar winner, is to movies what *Miss Saigon* is to musicals—lavishly mounted and consistently entertaining, though hardly as profound as it means to be. Catherine Deneuve plays a French colonial in 1930 Indochina, a control freak whose only real human contact is with her adopted native daughter Camille (Linh Dan Pham). The break comes when Camille falls for a young French navy lieutenant (Vincent Perez) Mom recently had an affair with. Throw in colonial brutality and a Communist revolution and the pot boils briskly.

Deneuve's smashing looks (nearing age 50 and in her 70th movie) and fabu-

lous clothes are the biggest attraction, but she is also a good, economic actress. The scenery is nice, nobody overacts and the picture makes its points without getting too far on a soapbox. The transfer, letterboxed to 1.85:1, is generally fine, but the subtitles are in the frame, not the black band where they belong.

—SLS

## The Magnificent Seven/ Return of the Seven

1960/1966. Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, Warren Oates; dir. John Sturges. Digital mono, letterboxed. (NR) 233 min. CLV 4 sides \$49.95. MGM/UA.

*The Magnificent Seven*, based on Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, did better in Japan than Kurosawa's original did, and producer/director John Sturges (*Bad Day at Black Rock*) was as proud of this picture as of anything he'd ever done. The source of its success is obvious from the moment Yul Brynner enters the action: Kurosawa's film is infinitely better nuanced and crafted, but Sturges' movie has more heart. This restored version is a major improvement on the old letterboxed edition, with none of the muddiness or poor resolution that marred that disc. It's still a little pale, but as the notes explain, this is probably as good as it will ever get.

*Return of the Seven* looks better, but is only a fair sequel, less focused, heavier on violence and sparked only slightly by a pair of good character actors (Warren Oates, Claude Akins) who don't do enough. Think of the film as a bonus in this package, which along with a free-standing music track containing Elmer Bernstein's classic score, is well worth the extra \$10.

—BE

## CLASSICS

### Monster on the Campus

1959. B&W. Arthur Franz, Whit Bissell; dir. Jack Arnold. Mono, cc. (NR) 77 min. \$14.95. MCA/Universal.

### It Came From Outer Space

1953. B&W. Richard Carlson, Barbara Rush; dir. Jack Arnold. Mono, cc. (NR) \$14.95. MCA/Universal.

These are just two of the titles in MCA/Universal's Golden Age of Science Fiction Collection, but they show



Alien Nation: *It Came From Outer Space* to home video.

what a mixed bag the series really is. *It Came From Outer Space* is an intelligent and troubling chiller about a spaceship landing on Earth, seen in part from the point-of-view of the "invaders"; *Monster on the Campus* is a dumb little Jekyll-and-Hyde thriller about a scientist whose contact with the blood of a prehistoric fish transforms him into a murderous man-ape. Jack Arnold directed both films, and delivers a few thrills and funny moments in the latter, but he clearly had more of his heart in *It Came From Outer Space*.

Both transfers are good, but the production values of *Monster on the Campus* are so low that this really isn't important. *It Came From Outer Space* is so subtle and complex that every shadow matters—it's the difference between focusing on giant bugs or scary and troubling ideas. Others in the series include the exceptionally inventive chillers *The Monolith Monsters* and *Island of Terror*, *Cult of the Cobra* (which has a cult of its own) and the wretched embarrassments of *The Leech Woman* and *The Land Unknown*, which make *Monster on the Campus* look like 2001.

—BE

Two To Tango:  
*Indochine*'s Catherine Deneuve  
and Linh Dan Pham



# TAPES & DISCS

## *Anna and the King of Siam*

1946. B&W. Rex Harrison, Irene Dunne, Lee J. Cobb; dir. John Cromwell. Mono. (NR) 128 min. \$19.98. FoxVideo.

## *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*

1958. Ingrid Bergman, Curt Jurgens, Robert Donat; dir. Mark Robson. Mono. (NR) 158 min. \$19.98. FoxVideo.

## *It Happens Every Spring*

1949. B&W. Ray Milland, Jean Peters, Paul Douglas; dir. Lloyd Bacon. Mono. (NR) 87 min. \$19.98. FoxVideo.

FoxVideo continues its Studio Classic series showcases with an eclectic trio of releases: two movies based on fact and one that is most definitely fiction.

Of the three movies, the best-known is probably *Anna and the King of Siam*, based on the actual experiences of an Englishwoman teaching the king's children in 19th Century Siam (modern Thailand). Its success spawned the stage and screen musical *The King and I* (which made Yul Brynner both bald and an international star). This non-musical version neatly mixes light comedy of character with melodrama and is carried by the story's key relationship: the unspoken attraction between the king (a lively Rex Harrison) and the teacher (Irene Dunne). Their battles over protocol, etiquette, and whether to send elephants to Abraham Lincoln are delightful.

The second release, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, is also a fish-out-of-water, fact-based story, as English missionary Ingrid Bergman tries to help Chinese peasants better themselves. The movie is an epic with a little bit of everything: exotic locales (supposedly China, but actually North Wales), charming peasants, romantic separations, hair's breadth escapes and fortune-cookie-like aphorisms. Through it all, Bergman is a virtuous superwoman, a kind of St. Joan in China, and her efforts certainly underline the point of this fairly silly movie: you can achieve anything if you believe in it enough.

The final film, *It Happens Every Spring*, is a sweet screwball comedy, with Ray Milland as a chemistry professor who fulfills his dream to pitch a winning game in the world series. The lightweight material — something about a

substance that prevents baseballs from hitting wood — is redeemed by the charming cast, especially Paul Douglas as Milland's baseball buddy and Milland himself as the absent-minded professor. *Spring* is a big-screen sitcom that's finally found its true home.

—TS

## *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?*

1977. Kurt Raab, Lillith Ungerer; dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Mono. (NR) 88 min. priced for rental. *New Yorker*.

One wonders if this early feature by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (co-directed by Michael Fengler) had a greater effect on audiences who didn't know the ending in advance: After 60 minutes depicting his sadly banal life, a middle-class suburbanite picks up a lamp and murders his family. The movie is filmed in pseudo-documentary style, with dialog improvised by the actors. Despite the obvious bourgeoisie-bashing, *Herr R.* rises above the level of parody: The situations Fassbinder and Fengler provide for star Kurt Raab are more sympathetic than snide (though inevitably there's some of that as well).

—MF

founded attempts to film it. (The first was Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.) This version, made by Nicolas Roeg for cable TV, is more faithful to Conrad's narrative — perhaps too much so: Viewers unfamiliar with the novel are likely to find this adaptation a murky trip. Tim Roth is well-cast as Marlow, whose journey into the Congo exposes him to man's capacity for evil. But as Kurtz, the once-civilized madman who now rules his own jungle empire, John Malkovich is almost as bizarrely mannered as Marlon Brando was in Coppola's film.

—MF

# INTERACTIVE

## *Escape From Monster Manor*

1993. 3DO CD. \$59.95. Electronic Arts. *Total Eclipse*

1993. 3DO CD \$59.95. Crystal Dynamics.

Although we've heard endless hype about the technical wizardry behind the 3DO multimedia platform, we haven't been able to tell much about the machine because software has been hard to come by. But if these two new discs indicate the quality of upcoming 3DO titles, the platform has a bright future indeed.

The object of *Monster Manor* is to find your way through a 12-story house of horrors while blasting scores of ghosts, grim reapers and spiders. The game-play can keep you riveted to the screen for hours on end, and the fast-moving, detailed 3-D graphics are superior to anything we've seen on any multimedia or game platform. And the sound effects — real screams, growls and crashes — are guaranteed to keep you on edge.

*Total Eclipse* starts from an all-too-conventional premise: a futuristic fighter-plane shoot-'em-up. But it's clearly the most advanced realization of this concept to date. The idea is simple — fly across mountainous terrain and through tunnels while blowing away everything in your path. There's so much laser-fire flying around, it's tough to tell what's going on. But maneuvering your plane through the 3-D texture-mapped mountains makes for a truly exciting videogame experience — the next best thing to a real flight simulator.

—Brent Butterworth

# TELEVISION

## *Heart of Darkness*

1994. John Malkovich, Tim Roth; Nicolas Roeg. Stereo. (NR) 105 min. priced for rental. LD \$39.99. Turner.

Joseph Conrad's short masterpiece *Heart of Darkness* has now twice con-



TODAY'S

# VIDEOPHOTOGRAPHY

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## Great Gear For Making Great Videos



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The Latest in Camcorders, Editors & Accessories

## Steady As It Goes

Bogen's 3170 tripod/micro fluid head combination gives your video productions a professional quality. The 3170 takes the weight off your shoulders and out of your hand and



gives better stability than any in-camera system could provide.

The 3170 incorporates two of Bogen's finest products: their 3001 tripod and their 3126 micro fluid head. The 3001 is the lightest (about 3.5 pounds) and smallest tripod (folds down to 21 inches) Bogen offers. Its legs feature three click-stop spread angles and are made of tubular hard-finish aluminum.

The 3126 micro fluid head weighs only 2.25



## For Serious Shooters

If you're serious about your video productions, then Canon's L2 is the camcorder for you. The L2 is a Hi8 unit that combines Canon's popular VL Mount System for interchangeable lenses with RC (Rewriteable Consumer) Time Code. It is the first camcorder to include date scan and search functions, enabling you to edit right from the camcorder's body.

Canon's VL Mount Systems lets lenses be quickly released and attached to the camcorder body while still retaining full focus, iris, and zoom control with each lens. The lenses and camera communicate with one another via electric points located on the lenses and camcorder body. The camcorder sends commands to the microprocessors that control the lens, allowing for fast and accurate shooting with a variety of lenses including 3x (extrawide), 8x, 15x, 250mm (super telephoto), and 10x (with optical image stabilizer).

The RC Time Code function provides location and editing capability. RC Time Code is recorded directly onto the videotape, precisely identifying each individual frame by hour, minute, second, and frame. Conventional tape counters keep track of approximate running time and are far less accurate than RC Time Code.

The L2 also records month, day, year, and time on

(continued on Supplement page 6)

pounds and includes an adjustable handle that can be placed on either the right or left side. It pans smoothly a full 360 degrees and can tilt 90 degrees up or down. It also has pan and tilt locks, and a continuously adjustable positioning slot for proper camera balancing.

For more information about the 3170, consult your local Bogen dealer.

## More Power To You

*Canon's L2 gives you all the high-end capabilities you need for professional-style videos.*

"More power" is more than just the catchphrase of comedian Tim Allen's *Home Improvement* TV show. It is also a phrase common to all videographers who know the importance of having enough power to finish the shoot. Battery-Tech has found a way to



give you "more power" without adding weight to your camcorder.

Battery-Tech's 6-volt Powerpac+ delivers a minimum of 5 to 7 hours of recording time. Plus, the unit fits around your waist, taking the weight off your camcorder.

The Powerpac+ is available for virtually all 6-volt, 9.6-volt, and 12-volt camcorders. There is even a model available for Panasonic's new AG-455 camcorder. Each unit comes with a heavy-duty pouch and belt, a lead acid-memory free battery, a charger for charging at home, and an adaptor for your particular camcorder. An optional charger for car, boat, or plane is also available.

For more information, call Battery-Tech at 800-442-4275.

## Azden's Sonic Zoom

One of the most effective ways to improve the sound quality of your home videos inexpensively is with a "shotgun" or "zoom" microphone. The camera's built-in microphone is omnidirectional, picking up sounds indiscriminately from all directions no matter which direction you are pointing the camera. The pick-up pattern of a zoom mic



JVC GR-AX70

## JVC Shows Its True Colors

Color your world correctly with JVC's new GR-AX70 VHS-C camcorder. The GR-AX70 uses a new type of CCD chip that uses oval pixels, which sense incoming

### JVC's GR-AX70

*VHS-C camcorder provides better colors and a host of features in a compact package.*

light more effectively and provide clear pictures with natural colors — even in low-light conditions. Plus, the new chip offers higher sensitivity and a 2 dB increase in the signal-to-noise ratio.

And the innovations don't stop there. The GR-AX70 also offers a two-speed 12x zoom with a three-position

zoom control that lets you adjust the zoom rocker for the size of your hands. It is adjustable to accommodate small, medium, and large hands.

The GR-AX70 comes packed with other convenience features as well. A high-resolution 103,000-pixel color LCD makes it easier to pick out your subject from the surrounding area. There is also an Auto Pause function that automatically pauses the camcorder even if you forget to, saving tape and battery power. After two seconds of being pointed towards the ground, the unit will automatically stop recording. Of course, if recording the ground is what you intend to do, the function can be disabled.

To make more entertaining videos, the GR-AX70

(continued on Supplement page 6)

is narrower, eliminating some of the side noises, and allowing you to focus on your subject. The effective range is 35 to 40 feet.

The Azden ECZ-990 zoom microphone is only 5 inches in length, and has a two-position switch



for narrowing or widening the pattern. The suggested retail price is \$100.

## Get Charged With Lenmar

Lenmar Enterprises Inc. has announced the availability of the OmniSource 10.12, an AC/DC rapid Charger/Recharger for 9.6V, 10V, and 12V full-size VHS camcorder batteries. Lenmar Model BCR10 will accept Panasonic, RCA, Hitachi, JVC, Sharp, Magnavox,

Quasar, Minolta, GE, Sears, Zenith, and equivalent brands of VHS camcorder batteries.

It features a quick discharge and automatic



rapid charge for Nickel Cadmium batteries. For NoMEM™ and lead acid batteries, it has a "Charge Only" setting. It comes complete with an AC charger and DC adaptor so you can charge your batteries at home or in the car. It has LED indicators that signal when the battery is fully charged and the auto cut off prevents overcharging.

See your local dealer or call Lenmar direct at 800-424-2703.

## Sima Makes Magic

So you want to add dazzling graphics and dynamic audio to your home video productions, but don't have the money for the expensive processors on today's market. No problem: Sima, known for

### Nady 351 VR



## Put Your Mic Where Your Mouth Is

Audio is often a secondary consideration when buying a camcorder, with the built-in mic on the front of the unit being relied on to record all the desired sounds. The on-camera mic, however, is located closer to the videographer than any of the subjects. This leads to more unwanted camera-person noise (breathing, camera movements, etc.) and less of the sounds you want to hear.

Nady lets you bring a new dimension of sound to your video productions with their 351 VR wireless mic system. Unlike on-camera microphones, the 351 VR goes right to the source, using a microphone placed near the subject and sending quality audio to the camera-mounted receiver that can be placed up to 200 feet away with no degradation in performance.

The 351 VR features Nady's smallest receiver ever — not much bigger than an audio cassette. It uses Nady's Surface Mount Technology (SMT) in order to achieve its diminutive size, making it able to be attached to even the most compact of camcorders.

The 351 VR also includes two of Nady's finest transmitters: the HT-10 handheld mic and the LT-20 lavaliere mic. Both transmitters feature an industry-best 16 to 20 hours of battery life. The HT-10 has a balanced

(continued on Supplement page 7)

their quality electronic camcorder accessories, has provided all the enhancement power you'll need at a reasonable price with the introduction of their Video Pro-Magic digital art effects generator and audio mixer.

The Video Pro-Magic produces professional-quality effects with the touch of a button. Included in the unit's effects arsenal is Strobe, which is offered in high, medium, and low speeds; Freeze, which stops the action for as long as you want; Paint, which creates an interesting and artistic distortion of color and form; and Mosaic, which can create large and small patterns of both negative and positive images. These effects can also be combined to create an array of captivating images.

But the creative power of Video Pro-Magic doesn't stop there. Combine these scenes with the Picture-in-Picture or Multiscreen options and the possibilities are endless. The Picture-in-Picture function lets another



image be added in any corner of the screen in motion and still, while

the Multiscreen function has either four or nine frames fill the screen.

What good is exciting video with poor audio? The Video Pro-Magic lets you add music, narration, or both to the video soundtrack via the included dynamic omnidirectional microphone.

And although the Video Pro-Magic does so much, it comes at a reasonable retail price of under \$500.

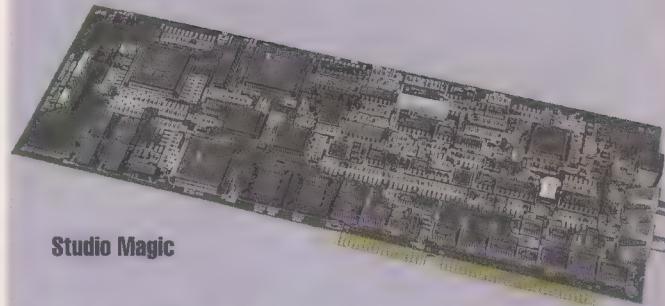
Contact your local Sima dealer for more information on how the Video Pro-Magic can add life to your videos.

## Camcorder Accessory Gear Guide

**✓ Case or Bag.** Look for something lightweight, with plenty of dividers and pockets that will expand with your growing collection of gear. Make sure the strap is comfortable!

**✓ Tripod.** Make sure it is designed for video, not for still photography; look for a fluid pan head, lightweight aluminum construction, and quality pan/tilt gears.

**✓ Brace.** Sometimes you have to move and a tripod won't do. Some sort of brace or prop is also advised. The Steadicam Jr. is highly recommended here.



Studio Magic

## A Personal Video Studio For Computers

Get out from under that mound of expensive gear and get into the one-piece post-production studio: Studio Magic. Studio Magic turns your IBM/Windows-compatible computer into an on-line post-production suite, giving you editing capabilities in addition to a special-effects processor and titler. You can combine Studio Magic with various sorts of video input — including camcorders, VCRs, laserdisc players, and more — and create professional-quality videos at a fraction of the price.

*Do quality editing and add dynamic special effects to your videos through your IBM/Windows computer.*

With Studio Magic, you can acquire video from up to two sources and can preview all your computer and video sources from the VGA screen. You can also do screen captures for use in multimedia presentations or in a video photo album.

The built-in titling capability lets you add full-color titles in any Windows font. You can also import titles as bitmaps from any Windows-compatible program. Computer generated text, graphics, and animation can also be laid over the video to create interesting visuals.

Studio Magic also allows you to keep your videos interesting by offering a number of transitions including horizontal and vertical wipes and dissolves between effects. Plus, you can design your own special effects library that includes metalization, high contrast, black/white polarization, colorization, subtle-to-extreme solarization, and luma key to solid color.

For convenient editing, Studio Magic supports

(continued on Supplement page 7)

**✓ Auxiliary Batteries.** You never have enough juice. So bring along backups and, of course, make sure they are already charged. Several battery rechargers plug into your car battery in case you still run low while in the field.

**✓ Lights.** Of course, you need a light that plugs directly into your camcorder. But, if you are really serious, separate studio lights (with their own stands) are also recommended.

**✓ Microphones.** Several different varieties will help improve your video's sound. At least one wireless mic and one shotgun should be tucked into your production accessory sack.

**✓ Lens Adapters.** For those tough-to-get shots, an add-on telephoto lens adapter will come in handy. The 2x magnification variety generally does the job.

**✓ Color Monitor.** A portable TV will help you get a better picture of what you've captured on tape than the EVF. If you don't mind the load, a small CRT is advised, but for lighter loads a portable LCD model is still an improvement.

**✓ 35mm Camera.** Yes, don't forget a camera. Still photos will come in

useful during the editing process (that is, if you are equipped with a converter like the Tamron Fotovix). An electronic still camera is an alternative that is especially valuable for desktop video editing and effects.

## Canon L2

(continued from page 2)

each frame. And the date scan and date search functions conveniently let you find whatever event you look for within a maximum of 99 days. The date scan function searches in fast forward or rewind and plays back approximately ten seconds of footage each time a change in date is detected in the data code. The date search function counts the number of changes in the date to reach the desired location and automatically begins playback.

And that's not all this feature-filled camcorder has to offer. The L2 also includes creative digital effects that can be produced during recording and playback. These include Wipe, which slides a new scene over an old one; Overlap, which gradually dissolves the old image into the next scene; Freeze, which records any image as a still frame; Art Freeze, which adds solarization effects to a still frame; Close-Up, which doubles the magnifica-



Toshiba M-760

## High Tech Toshiba

Whether you are watching your own video productions, time shifting favorite programs, or viewing pre-recorded videotapes, Toshiba's high-tech M-760 VCR delivers sharp images, Hi-Fi stereo sound, and a number of sophisticated convenience features.

Just what makes the M-760 so high tech? For starters it uses a unique "flying pre-amp" that, when used with the unit's six video heads, provides a picture quality in the commonly used extended play (EP) mode that is virtually indistinguishable from the image you get in the standard play (SP) mode. So you can record even more on one tape and still get dynamic images.

Flying pre-amps have traditionally only been found on professional decks and are used to amplify the video signal while it is still inside the VCR's rotating head cylinder. And because the cylinder is located in the back of the unit, almost no video noise enters the signal during playback.

The M-760 also features Toshiba's new V3 chassis, which uses large-scale integration (LSI) technology for a more efficient circuit design and reduced energy consumption. Plus, if there is a problem, the M-760 has a built-in diagnostic system that locates the trouble quickly and easily.

For video editing, the M-760 features a quad-mode shuttle that provides fingertip access to the full range of transport and viewing functions — including bi-directional frame advance for precise editing.

Other convenience features that the M-760 offers include a universal remote with Intel-A-Play, which turns on the television and selects the proper play-

(continued on Supplement page 7)

tion of the zoom lens by enlarging the central part of the image to twice its size; and Slow-Shutter, which produces an artistic "after-image" effect when shooting in low-light levels.

Other L2 qualities include a high-performance 410,000-pixel CCD, a flying erase head, full auto mode, a built-in character generator and date/time display, and a LANC terminal that enables two-way communication between the L2 and other editing components.

For more information, consult your local Canon dealer or call Canon at 800-828-4040.

## JVC GR-AX70

(continued from page 3)

has eight program AE modes with special effects including Sports, Portrait, High-Speed Shutter, Twilight, Monotone, Electronic Fog Filter, Self-Timer, and Auto Mode Lock. And after the shooting's done, JVC's Random Assemble Editing function can help you make a perfect Video Album — eliminating the scenes you don't want and bringing together (up to eight at a time) the ones you do.

With the GR-AX70, you can also create titles with the unit's built-in title generators. You can use one of the eight pre-

set instant titles, create a 10-character message with the character generator, use the giant datestamp, or any combination of the three.

Other features include a wireless remote control, flying erase head, auto head cleaner, audio dubbing, and insert editing.

For more information on this versatile camcorder, contact your local JVC dealer.

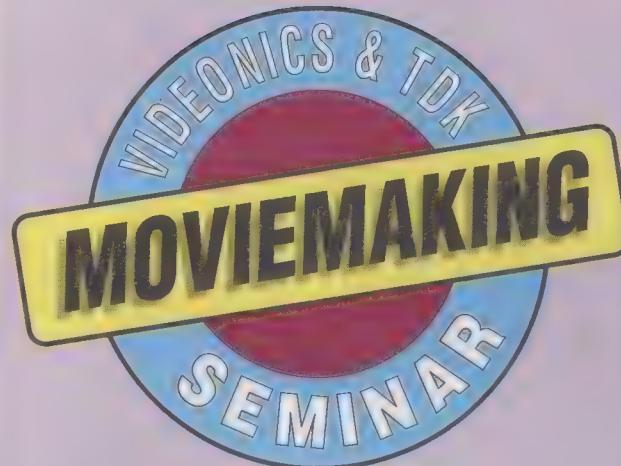
## Nady 351VR

(continued from page 4)

design and a rugged, all-metal case. The LT-20 includes a lavalier mic and a compact bodypack transmitter (also with SMT) that can be attached and concealed almost anywhere. Both transmitters have an Audio On/Off switch, transmitter On/Off switch, level trim, and low-battery LED.

As far as sound quality goes, the system's noise companding noise-reduction circuitry helps produce a dynamic range of 120 dB with no background hiss or overload distortion. The system can be placed up to 200 feet away in adverse conditions and up to 1500 feet line of sight. The 351 VR has a list price of \$299.95.

So start hearing what you've been missing in your home videos. Contact Nady at 510-652-2411 for more information.



## Videonics Has Class

Ever wish you could make better video productions? Looking for the right source to tell you all you need to know about making movie magic? Look no further: Videonics, known for their innovative line of

video production tools, and TDK are now offering traveling seminars that tell you how to add dazzle to your tapes.

There are two seminars being offered. The first is entitled "The MovieMaking Seminar," and it tells you what they didn't discuss in your camcorder manual.

Learn how camcorder technique, including pre-production, composition, and framing, can bring new life to your videos. Also covered is how to use accessories like batteries, videotape, tripods, microphones, and video lights to their fullest extent. You can even find out about editing and a complete vocabulary of shots.

The second seminar is called the "Videonics Tips & Tricks Seminar," and it tells you how to take your previously shot footage and make it better using several of Videonics' most-popular editing accessories: the Thumbs Up, the Video TitleMaker, the Sound Effects Mixer, the Video Equalizer, and the Digital Video Mixer. If you want to know how to get the best out of your Videonics editing system or if you just want to get a closer look at what these tools can do for your videos, then this seminar is for you.

The seminars provide a great way to learn and to

(continued on Supplement page 8)

## Studio Magic

(continued from page 5)

Sony VISCA protocol for controlling up to three video devices using Studio Magic and a Sony Vbox. The software also supports MCI devices as well as Control L and Control M. On the audio side, it can interface with MIDI, WAV, and CD audio devices.

The Studio Magic does all this and much more — too much to list here — but suffice it to say that it gives you everything you want to dress up your home videos — all for \$499.95.

For more information on Studio Magic, call 408-378-3838.

## Toshiba M-760

(continued from page 6)

back channel automatically when turning on the VCR; VCR Plus+ C3 cable box channel control; a full-sized chassis for integration into any audio/video system; and a full-loading quick access transport mechanism, which provides near-instantaneous picture access and quieter operation from any mode.

Step up to the new level of VCR technology with the M-760. For more information, contact your local Toshiba dealer.

## Videonics

(continued from page 7)

meet other individuals with the same interests as you. You are invited to bring your camcorder and share tips and techniques with attendees who shoot with similar equipment.

Plus, you get something for nothing: All seminar participants receive a free package of "video tools" that includes a handbook, Color Bar Chart, video magazine, and more. You'll also receive a coupon for a free blank videotape in your choice of format.

So what are you waiting for. Start making better videos now. The 1994 program covers 33 cities between March and November. Call Videonics at 1-800-338-EDIT (Mon.-Fri., 8 AM-5 PM Pacific) to find out when the seminars will be in your area and to register.

## Caring For Your Camcorder

Today's camcorders are built to last, but there are a few tips you can follow to ensure that your camcorder will be ready to shoot whenever you are.

- Never leave a video-cassette in the unit when it is stored or

# Shooting Tips

- 1 Bring plenty of extra battery power. You can never have too much power.
- 2 Invest in production accessories: tripods for stability, lights for image quality, microphones for sound quality and a case to carry it around and protect your investment.
- 3 When doing a hand-held shoot, steady your whole body as much as possible by leaning on something or forming a rigid stance with your legs.
- 4 Plan out your shots (sequence, movements, angles, etc.) completely before you begin shooting.
- 5 If possible, avoid walking while shooting. Find something with wheels and dolly the scene.
- 6 Don't overuse the zoom. And don't use the zoom when you can easily pause the camcorder, move in for a close-up, and resume shooting.
- 7 One of the most basic formulas for setting up action and introducing a scene is to shoot a long shot, followed by a medium shot of the subject, which is followed by a close-up.
- 8 The inside of your lens cap is a boring shot. Make sure it is off before you shoot.
- 9 Don't rely on lux ratings. If a scene looks too dark in your viewfinder it probably is — bring along extra lighting if your location doesn't have alternate light sources.
- 10 Learn how to use the camcorder before the big day. Practice and become familiar with all of its features.
- 11 Always rewind your tapes when you are finished shooting. Also, don't leave your tapes in the camcorder — it can crinkle or crease the tape.
- 12 If you have to use your camcorder as a VCR, invest in a rewinder. It'll save wear and tear on the camcorder's motors and gears.
- 13 When editing, use effects sparingly. Never use an effect just for the sake of using an effect.

turned off for a long period of time.

- If the battery does not have enough power to eject the tape, insert a fresh battery or plug the unit into the wall while you release the tape. Do not try to force the tape door open.

- If your camcorder does not have an automatic lens cover, be sure to keep the lens protected from bright lights and scratches when not in use.

- Those new built-in stabilizers are great for steady shots, but you should still be careful not to subject the camcorder to sudden, violent moves.

- You should not try to record immediately after taking your camcorder from a cool environment to a warm one. Condensation can form and the camera won't work anyway. If you have a dew indicator, it will come on and the camcorder will not work until the condensation evaporates. Removing the cassette will help decrease the waiting time.

- Only clean the lens with lens-cleaning fluid and a tissue.

- Do not store your camcorder in extreme temperatures — high or low. So, although it's good to be prepared to shoot at any time, under the back seat of your car is not a good spot to keep a camcorder.

- Always remove the battery when the camcorder is not being used.

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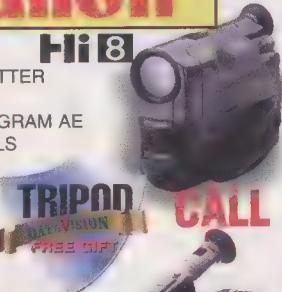
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# DIRECTORY

## HIGHLIGHTS

### The Ballad of Little Jo

1993. Suzy Amis, Bo Hopkins, Ian McKellen; dir. Maggie Greenwald. True story of woman who survives as a pioneer in the West by establishing a liberating new identity as a man. Stereo. (R) 124 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line.

### Billboards

1994. The Joffrey Ballet; dir. Gerald Arpino. The Joffrey Ballet dance to a full-length rock ballet constructed around Prince songs. Stereo. (NR) 75 min. VHS \$24.98. LD \$34.98. Warner Reprise.

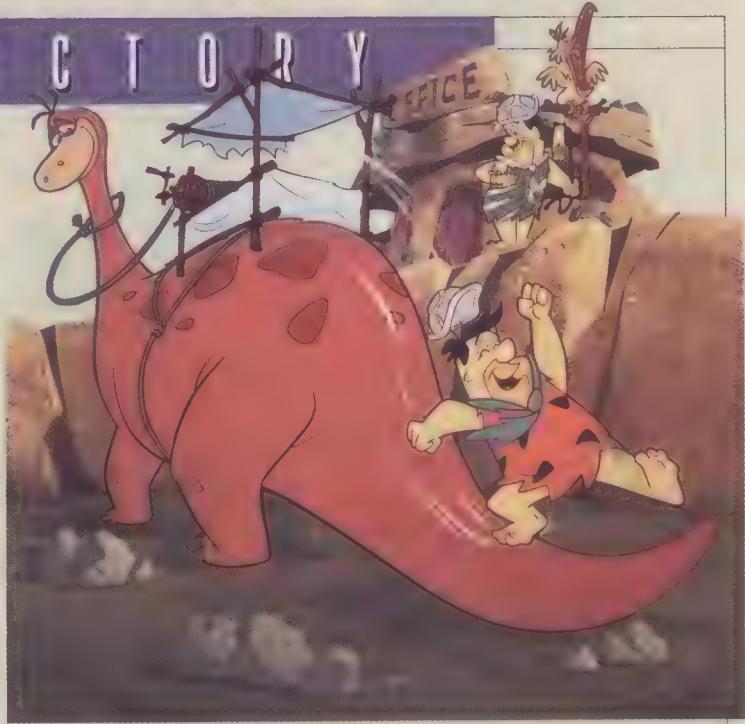
### City Slickers

1991. Billy Crystal, Daniel Stern, Bruno Kirby, Jack Palance; dir. Ron Underwood. Feel-good mid-life crisis comedy, guaranteed to cure any similar depressions, now in a THX-approved laserdisc. Palance wins Oscar, one hand tied behind his back. Surrounded. (PG-13) 112 min. LD letterboxed \$39.99. New Line.

### The Flintstones

1960. Voices of Alan Reed, Mel Blanc, Jean Vander Pyl, Bea Benaderet. Prepare for the movie n'merchandising event of the year

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with eight restored, previously fossilized episodes of the animated series. Mono. (NR) 50 min. each. VHS only, \$12.98 each 2-episode tape. Turner.

### Good Evening Mr. Wallenberg

1994. Stellan Skarsgard; dir. Kjell Grede. Story of the Swedish diplomat who saved over 100,000 Jews by handing out immunity status and Swedish passports, and confronting those responsible for the elimination of the Budapest ghetto. Stereo, subtitled. (NR) 115 min. VHS only, \$89.98. Fox Lorber.

### Malice

1993. Alec Baldwin, Nicole Kidman, Bill Pullman; dir. Harold Becker. Doc, dean and the beautiful wife dunked into "a dark web of intrigue, betrayal and deception." Another "sexy thriller" from the director of *Sea of Love*. Surround. (R) 107 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line.

### Montparnasse Revisited Series

1994. Dir. Jean-Marie Drot. Films from the '60s containing interviews with over 150 members of the 1905-35 artistic community are updated and complemented with color footage of the artists' work: *The Brilliant Years - 1900-1914, Artists at War - 1914-1918, Face to Face With Giacometti, A Day in the Life of Man Ray, Who Was Modigliani?, The Man Behind Picasso - Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Ghosts at the Banquet, Songs and Sentiments, The Composers, Soutine the Obsessed*. Stereo. (NR) 55 min each. VHS \$29.95 each, 10 part series \$199.95. Public Media.

### The Story of Qui Ju

1993. Gong Li; dir. Zhang Yimou. Defiant village farmer seeks justice for husband and dignity in the face of bureaucracy. Best Picture and Best Actress at Venice. Stereo, subtitled. (PG) 100 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$34.95. Columbia TriStar.

### Sure Fire

1994. Tom Blair, Kristi Hager, Robert Ernst; dir. Jon Jost. Small-town Utah entrepreneur trying to make a killing selling vacation and retirement homes turns to violence when things start to come apart. Stereo. (NR) 83 min. VHS letterboxed \$89.98. World Artists.

### La Vie Parisienne

1994. Helene Delavault; dir Alain Francon. Offenbach's light and joyous spirit is alive

*continued on page 86*

## Labels For Less

This month you'll find men with swords and women with songs in budget-priced titles from the big labels. First, music men are under examination at MGM/UA in a series of biopics, documentaries and biodramas: *Lisztomania*, *Round Midnight* (homage to Bud Powell and Lester Young with performances by Dexter Gordon and Herbie Hancock), *Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser*, *Imagine: John Lennon, Sinatra, Pete Kelly's Blues* (with performances by Peggy Lee and Ella Fitzgerald), *Young Man With a Horn* (Bix Beiderbecke, with performances by Hoagy Carmichael), *I'll See You in My Dreams* (Gus Kahn), and *The Great Caruso* each sounding good at \$14.95.

At Turner, there is only one music man that counts, and that is Fred Astaire: *The Gay Divorcee*, *Follow the Fleet*, *Flying Down to Rio*, *A Damsel in Distress*, *The Sky's the Limit*, *Shall We Dance*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, *Carefree* and *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, each for only \$14.98. You'll be in heaven....

Warner men don't sing, but they sure as hell swashbuckle their way through *The Crimson Pirate*, *The Flame and the Arrow*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *King Richard and the Crusaders*, *The Castilian*, *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, *Ladyhawke*, *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Lionheart*, *The Prince and the Pirate*, *Excalibur* and *Masters of the Universe* all at the slashed price of \$19.98. —JK



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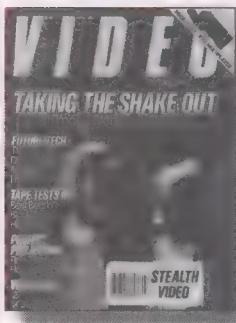
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# DIRECTORY

## HIGHLIGHTS

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### The Flintstones

1960. Voices of Alan Reed, William Fawcett, Yvonne De Carlo, Vander Pyl, Bea Benaderet. Movie 'n' merchandising even

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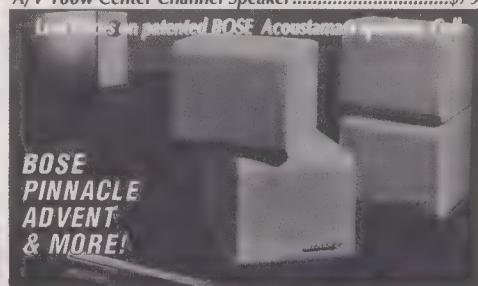
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continued from page 82

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#### Buck Rogers in the 25th Century

1979. Gil Gerard, Erin Gray; various dirs. Series based on '30s comic strip about intergalactic peacekeeper. One episode boasts cast including Jack Palance, Frank Gorshin and Jamie Lee Curtis, with the voice of Mel Blanc as Twiki. Stereo. (NR) VHS only, pilot 88 min. \$14.98, episodes 47 min. each \$12.98 each. MCA/Universal.

#### The Incredible Story of Dogs

1993. Dir. Micheal Waldman. Series examining canines and man's obsession with them, including doggie myths and religions, genetic engineering, cosmetic surgery and all else that has been projected and imposed on them. Poor puppies. Mono. (NR) 300 min. 3 tape set \$59.95. A&E.

#### Paul Robeson: Tribute to an Artist/ The Emperor Jones

1994 comp. Paul Robeson; nar. Sidney Poitier, dir. Saul J. Turell (*Tribute*), Dudley Murphy (*Jones*). Academy Award-winning documentary on Robeson — concert artist, Shakespearean actor, all-American athlete, scholar and political activist — doubled with his finest film performance as Eugene O'Neill's Brutus Jones. Mono. (NR) 101 min. VHS only \$19.95. Public Media.

#### Raquel!

1970. Raquel Welch, Tom Jones; dir. David Winters. Raquel duets with Tom Jones, renders "Aquarius" and "California Dreamin,'" greets John Wayne and Bob Hope and demonstrates her "full range of singing, dancing, and comedic talent." Stereo. (NR) 49 min. VHS only, \$19.98. V.I.E.W.

#### Rejuvenetics/More Rejuvenetics

1993. Kathy Keeton. Prevent age-related health problems, lose weight and stay younger with these ballet, yoga, tai chi and calisthenics combo workout tapes. Mono. (NR) 35 min each. VHS only, \$19.99 each. Best Film and Video.

#### The Sound and the Silence

1992. Brenda Fricker, John Bach, Ian Bannen; dir. John Kent Harrison. Drama of the man who invented the telephone, the iron lung and an early version of sonar, built the first British airplane, created a hydroplane that set the world speed record, and founded *The National Geographic* magazine. Stereo. (NR) part I 93 min, part II 93 min. VHS priced for rental. Turner.

#### The Vampyr

1993. Omar Ebrahim, Richard van Allan, Fiona O'Neill; dir. Nigel Finch. This, the

first vampire musical, was written in the early 19th century by Heinrich Marschner and has been updated in this acclaimed BBC production with lyrics from Charles (*Phantom of the Opera*) Hart. Stereo. (NR) 115 min. VHS only, \$89.98. CBS/Fox.

### When Ireland Starved

1993. Dir. Joe Dunn. Though Ireland produced enough to feed twice its population, 3 million died or fled as a result of the Great Famine after all the food was shipped to England. Stereo. (NR) 120 min. VHS only, \$29.95. Celtic Video (800-99C-EL-TIC).

### LASERDISCS

#### Gandhi

1982. Ben Kingsley, Candice Bergen, Edward Fox, John Mills, John Gielgud, Trevor Howard, Saeed Jaffrey, Martin Sheen, Ian Charleson; dir. Richard Attenborough. Looking at Attenborough's other work (most recently *Chaplin*), it's hard to believe he was capable of this solid biopic of the saintly revolutionary who helped force the British Empire to surrender India. Surround. (PG) 188 min. LD letterboxed \$49.95. Columbia TriStar.

#### House of Frankenstein/House of Dracula

1944-5. B&W. Boris Karloff, John Carradine, Lon Chaney; dir. Erle C. Kenton. Mad scientist unstakes Dracula who enlists Frankenstein's monster and Wolf Man to seek revenge on the village people. Then in *House II*, Wolf Man and Dracula find another scientist to cure them, Dracula gets hot for luscious lab assistant, doc revives the monster, etc. Mono. (NR) 138 min. LD \$59.98. MCA/Universal.

#### It Happened One Night

1934. Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert, Walter Connolly, Roscoe Karns; dir. Frank Capra. Reporter voyages across depression-era America following runaway heiress to get the scoop. A pure pleasure that deserved its five Oscars. Mono. (NR) 106 min. LD \$34.95. Columbia TriStar.

#### Kramer vs. Kramer

1979. Dustin Hoffman, Justin Henry, Meryl Streep; dir. Robert Benton. Hoffman and Streep at the height of their popularity (whatever happened to them?) as abandoned father (who looks after the son) and the wife who goes off to find herself. Five Oscars worth of backlash against feminism. Stereo. (PG) 105 min. LD letterboxed. \$34.95. Columbia TriStar.

#### Oliver

1968. Ron Moody, Oliver Reed, Harry Secombe, Mark Lester, Jack Wild; dir. Carol Reed. Happy-go-lucky children's musical about pimps, prostitutes, child labor and child exploitation, partner-battering and murder. Six Oscars. Stereo. (G) 146 min. LD letterboxed. \$39.95. Columbia TriStar.

#### When Harry Met Sally

1989. Billy Crystal, Meg Ryan, Bruno Kirby, Carrie Fisher; dir. Rob Reiner. The new THX-approved laserdisc is essential for viewing this endlessly watchable all-time great comedy. Surround. (R) 95 min. LD letterboxed \$39.99. New Line.

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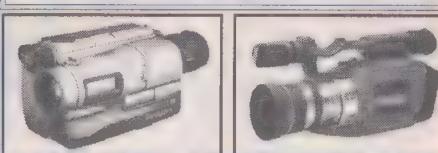
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## HOME THEATER

continued from page 22

speaker turns the movie sound of the DCS-994 from unpleasant to acceptable. Replace the center speaker, double the power in the surround and center channels to 30 watts per, and Fisher might have a product sonically competitive with an inexpensive, receiver-based system. Judging from the appearance and specs of the other rack/shelf systems I've seen, these comments would apply to most of them, too.

The DCS-994 still has to be considered a decent value, because even with its low performance, it offers a lot for \$1,000. But I wondered how much extra you'd have to pay for a receiver-based system that would offer truly satisfying performance. To find out, I consulted a few buyer's guides.

For electronics, I found Sony's \$430 STR-D711 receiver, which would offer much greater functionality — including video switching and music surround modes — than the DCS-994. It matches the DCS-994's power in the main channels. But with 65 watts for the center channel and 20 watts for the surrounds, it offers enough power to achieve the volume levels action movies demand. To this, you could add Fisher's \$149 CRW-683 dual-cassette deck and Fisher's \$399 DAC-2403 24-CD changer, which are practically the same as the units in the DCS-994.

For speakers, I found Boston Acoustics' good-sounding \$200/pair HD7s for the main speakers, \$150/pair HD5s for surround and the \$129 404V center speaker. These will offer dramatically higher performance than the DCS-994's speakers.

This system would clearly outperform the DCS-994, although it would be more complicated to set up and operate. Of course, it would cost a lot more than the DCS-994: \$1,439, a \$440 difference. But the 30-percent discounts often available on this type of equipment would cut the difference to \$307. For me, and I suspect for most people who are into audio and video, this would be \$307 well spent.

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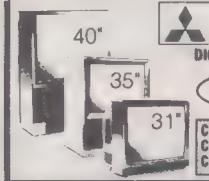
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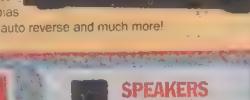
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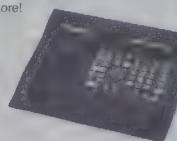
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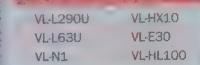


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April 1994	1/27/94	2/3/94
May 1994	3/3/94	3/10/94
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## CAMCORNER

continued from page 20

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## DECODERS

continued from page 43  
steering circuit.

The Three-A has a slew of features, as befits such an expensive product, including a special version of Fosgate's regular 70mm surround mode called 70mm Wide, which makes use of a second, side-wall-mounted pair of surround speakers to reproduce extreme left and right channel information for more dramatic, spectacular surround.

The Three-A also features several non-DSP music enhancement modes which don't add fake delays, but instead derive enhanced ambience from the recording itself—while I didn't find any of them an improvement over straight stereo for music, they did sound much less cheesy and ridiculous than the DSP-based ambience modes on the other processors.

In many ways, the Fosgate Three-A was the best-sounding processor of the bunch. Its retrieval of the most minute details in film soundtracks was superior even to the excellent ADA processor, allowing me to clearly hear details and cues—especially in the surround channel—I'd never heard before with any other processor. The Three-A's sound quality was every bit as clean and open as the ADA's, but while the ADA had a smooth and relaxed character, the Fosgate was upfront and lively.

Dynamically, the Fosgate outperformed the ADA, which didn't quite match the Three-A's punch when sounds "jumped" off the screen like the sudden pounce of the tiger in the jungle scene in *Apocalypse Now*. The Fosgate just had a vividness and a presence that the smoother-sounding ADA processor did not—I suspect that each processor will appeal to different tastes, as both offer the best sound quality I've heard yet from a surround processor. Either way, you can't go wrong—highly recommended! ■

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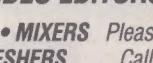
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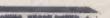


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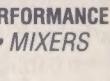


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## Confessions of a glued-to-the-tube, born-to-tape *videoholic*

There was the time (when I was working behind the counter in an erotic lingerie shop) that I faked a stomach ailment so I could close up early, grab a cab and rush home to see a TV show. And there was the time that a handsome prince (at least I thought so) got down on his knees in front of me. "Come with me and be my love!" he pleaded.

"I, er, have to check the *TV Guide* first," said I.

They say that watching too much television can rot your brain, ruin your life and make you plump in the wrong places. I find this insulting, even though I may be a little plump in some of the wrong places. But, in fact, without TV, I'd only be half the person I am. In more ways than one.

I am a child of the electronic media. I was the first kid on the block to have a tape recorder, which I used to tape the sound of TV shows I liked so I could listen to them again. I was the first one to have my own TV in my room. By the time I had my own place, I was a full-blown television addict. I couldn't make a move without first consulting a *TV guide*.

Eventually my friends intervened. They hardly ever saw me anymore. "Get a hobby," they said. "Get a life." I tried knitting, cooking, collecting china horses, most of the usual hobby stuff. But I remained unimpressed. I couldn't find a hobby I loved until video was invented!

I could tape and rewatch any show I wanted. I could tape shows while I was at work, while I was sleep-

ing, even while I was watching something else. I could collect the best movies and invite my friends over for marathons. I could tape all the appearances of all my favorite singers and actors. Video! What a concept! I was in heaven.

But as someone already addicted to TV, I found that video just made the habit worse. Where once I could only watch one show at a time, now I could watch one while taping three others. Before video I just watched TV a few hours a day; now I spend a lot more time watching. I went from being a teleholic to a *videoholic*.

I spend at least two hours a week poring through *TV Guide*, marking everything I want to watch, and all the shows I want to tape. It takes even longer to prepare all the tapes I'll need, to check how much time is left on each, to make labels, to copy and edit stuff, and to keep track of the accumulating tapes. I also have to find time to watch all the movies, TV shows and star turns I tape on all my VCRs, programs I would have let pass in the old days, when I could

only choose one at a time.

I also make tapes for several friends and my father of shows I think they would like to see. My poor deprived father doesn't have cable, so I tape documentaries and movies off CNN and A&E for him. And since my friends all have lives, I figure they don't have time to watch much TV. But I don't want them to miss things I know they would love. (God forgive me, am I trying to turn my friends into junkies too?)

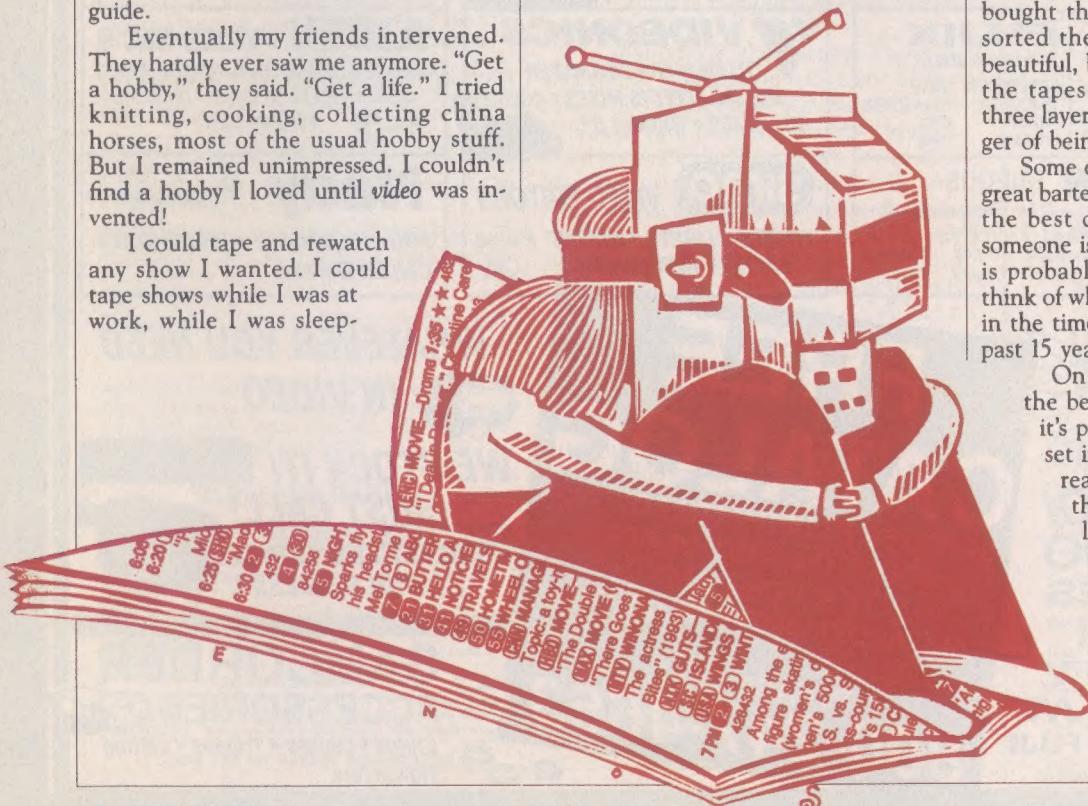
I keep a separate tape going at all times for each of my favorite groups, like Queen and Crowded House. I scour the *TV guide* each week looking for their appearances, and tape them all. I advertise in swap magazines for video clips. I tape whole broadcast days of the music video channel and scan through them later looking for news or clips about my favorites. Of course, these video clips all need editing, transitions, little black signals in between, and labels.

A few years ago the situation spun out of control. Hundreds of tapes lay scattered all over the house. I couldn't find tapes I wanted to watch. Finally, I bought three five-shelf bookcases and sorted the tapes into sections. It was beautiful, but it took a full month. Now the tapes on each shelf are two and three layers deep, and I am again in danger of being overwhelmed by it all.

Some ex-alcoholics go on to become great bartenders, some ex-druggies make the best drug counsellors. But when someone is addicted to television, video is probably not the solution. When I think of what I could have accomplished in the time I spent on my videos in the past 15 years, I could cry.

On the other hand, I love having the best video collection around—it's probably the most valuable asset in my will—and all my friends really envy me. They even bring their friends by to see my collection. They all beg to borrow rare and unusual shows. I've been able to help a ton of people searching for hard-to-find tapes, and that's a good feeling. Darn it, I'm proud to be a *video junkie*.

I wonder if that prince is still single? ■





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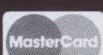
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